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# An Interview Study of Educational Success Among American Indian Doctoral Recipients

Linda L. Neuerburg

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AN INTERVIEW STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AMONG  
AMERICAN INDIAN DOCTORAL RECIPIENTS

by

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Bachelor of Science, University of North Dakota, 1990  
Master of Arts, University of North Dakota, 1993

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota  
December  
2000

This dissertation, submitted by Linda Lea Neuerburg in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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This dissertation meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

Carl Fyso  
Dean of the Graduate School

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	viii
ABSTRACT .....	x
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Indian Education Policy .....	3
Need for the Study .....	4
Purpose and Design of the Study .....	6
Delimitations .....	7
Organization of the Study .....	7
Operational Definitions .....	8
II. METHODOLOGY .....	11
Qualitative Research .....	11
Rationale for Choice of Methodology .....	22
Procedural Design .....	23
Collection of Data .....	25
Data Analysis .....	27

III	CONTEXT AND BACKGROUNDS OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS .....	33
	Introduction .....	33
	Regan Birch .....	34
	Gene Lone Oak .....	35
	Darcy Willow .....	37
	Rodney Pine .....	38
	Don Aspen .....	39
	Elaine Chestnut .....	40
	Linda Basswood .....	41
	Rena Hemlock .....	42
	Nancy Buck Eye .....	43
	Ginger Cottonwood .....	45
IV	THEMES AND DISCUSSION .....	48
	Theme One and Supporting Evidence .....	49
	Theme Two and Supporting Evidence .....	55
	Theme Three and Supporting Evidence .....	63
	Theme Four and Supporting Evidence .....	66
	Theme Five and Supporting Evidence .....	72
	Other Common Features and Supporting Evidence .....	78

V.	DISCUSSION OF THE LITERATURE IN REFERENCE TO THE THEMES .....	81
	<i>Theme One:</i> The value of education was highly stressed by the participant, his/her family, and mentors all through the educational experience .....	81
	<i>Theme Two:</i> A strong faculty member/ mentor and Native American support system (often called a community) was available and very important to the participants as they progressed to the completion of their terminal degree .....	86
	<i>Theme Three:</i> The participants had a positive self-image which contributed to a successful academic experience .....	92
	<i>Theme Four:</i> The participants describe themselves as self-disciplined and/or goal-oriented .....	95
	<i>Theme Five:</i> The participants engaged in extra-curricular activities during their schooling which enhanced their academic experience .....	97
	<i>Other Common Features</i> .....	99
VI.	SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS .....	102
	Summary .....	102
	Conclusions .....	105
	Implications .....	106
	Recommendations for Practice .....	108
	Recommendations for Future Research .....	109
	Personal Reflections .....	110
	APPENDIX .....	113
	REFERENCES .....	116

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. One example of the qualitative analysis process .....	31

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This study is dedicated to my husband, Bill, who has been my biggest supporter during my academic pursuit. He is my best friend and makes me laugh everyday which keeps me sane. Without his love and “common sense” approach to life I would be in big trouble everyday!



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to better understand the successful educational experiences among Native American doctoral recipients and why they succeeded where so many others have failed to reach that level of education. The participants' individual experiences were recorded during the in-depth interviews. Their own voices have indicated their path to success.

Qualitative research methods were used in the study including interviews, participant observation, and follow-up telephone interviews. Data were analyzed for themes and results were discussed in reference to the literature. Recommendations for parents, teachers, school administrators, mentors, faculty, and college administrators were provided.

The study allowed the participants to tell their stories about their road to success. Five themes and two other common factors emerged as a result of the study:

**Theme One:** The value of education was highly stressed by the participants, his/her family, and mentors all through the educational experience.

**Theme Two:** A strong faculty member/ mentor and Native American support system (often called a community) were available and very important to the participants as they progressed to the completion of their terminal degree.

**Theme Three:** The participants had a positive self-image which contributed to a successful academic experience.

**Theme Four:** The participants describe themselves as self-disciplined and/or goal-oriented.

**Theme Five:** The participants engaged in extra-curricular activities during their schooling which enhanced their academic experience.

**Other Common Features:** First, all but one participant stopped-out of school at least one time during their educational experience. Second, the participants were products of public, private, or parochial education during their preparatory years.

This study emphasizes the need for a qualitative look at what contributes to the academic success of Native American Students. Parents, teachers, faculty, mentors, and administrators must become aware of the important role they play in providing the five themes of support and other factors the participants indicated made them successful.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to better understand the successful educational experiences among Native American doctoral recipients from the north central United States. Why did they succeed where so many others have failed to reach that level of education? The only logical way to discover their road to success was to go out in the field and speak directly to these successful individuals.

Why is this important to pursue? Simply because hearing the stories about success and discovering the patterns for success will be useful to report to the schools with Native American students. Reporting about successes will contribute to faculty and administrative understanding in preparing teachers and faculty to assist in future successes and making new policy that will ensure success.

The National Center for Education Statistics (1989) reported that American Indian\* and Alaska Native students have a secondary school dropout rate of 35.5% or twice the national average; the highest dropout rate of any United States ethnic or racial group reported. The dropout problem is also reflected in the number of minority students attending U.S. colleges and universities. In 1997, the total number of minority students attending college increased 3.7 per cent, to 3,771,210. Of that enrollment,

**\* Native American and American Indian are used interchangeably throughout this study.**



Native Americans number 142,467 which represented a 3.6 percent increase for this population, yet a pitifully small percentage of the total U.S. enrollment which was reported as 14,502,334 in 1997 (Carlson, 1999).

The educational challenges faced by Native Americans becomes more acute as the Native American population increases. North Dakota state's population projections (Lebak, 1999) indicate the American Indian population will increase by 110.7 percent from 28,000 in 1995 to 59,000 in 2025. The American Indian population is younger on average than the non-Indian population. Nearly one half (49.8 percent) of the American Indian population in North Dakota in 1994 was estimated to be 19 years old or younger. The American Indian population has less formal education than the non-Indian population according to the 1990 census (21.0 percent had 9-12 years of education but did not receive a diploma compared to 8.0 percent of the non-Indian population) (Lebak, 1999).

With a Native American population this young, higher education in North Dakota can expect an large influx of Native American students to enter the state's institutions of education in the near future. Based on the historically high dropout rate, academia needs to be better prepared to assist these students in staying in school and completing every level they attempt.

Common sense would suggest that dropout prevention starts at home with parents and continues with teachers who give students every chance for success in the classroom and offer support services outside the classroom. If teachers and administrators are to provide Native American students with a concerted effort to keep them in school, they must be properly trained in schools of education with information about what helps

students to succeed in school and most logically, that information must come from successful students themselves as well as research. Parents must be educated about the function of the school and have input in what and how their children learn. Parents who participate in their children's education express to those children that they value education. As more Native American children enter schools, decreasing the dropout rates need to be at the forefront of policymaking.

### Indian Education Policy

Indian education issues have continually been addressed in policy since the Merriam Report was issued in 1928. This report discussed all the failed attempts to educate Native American and Alaska Native students. (Tullipano & Lundy-Ponce, 1999). The Kennedy Report in 1969 and the more recent Indian Nations At Risk Task Force Report in 1991 indicated that Native Americans were educationally 'at risk.' The 1991 report was so dismal that it prompted the 1992 White House Conference on Indian Education. President Clinton issued an executive order in 1998 outlining specific measures to improve academic performance and reduce the dropout rate of American Indian and Alaska Native students. (Tullipano & Lundy-Ponce, 1999).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, one of many Congressional acts to provide assistance to Indian education, was due for re-authorization in 1999. This legislative act included many education programs specifically for American Indian students. Regardless of how critical these programs might have been to reduce the dropout rate, more than half of the programs were not re-authorized for funding. Because of treaty obligations, it would be accurate to say that the federal government has a major



responsibility for Native American students having the highest dropout rates. Federal education programs have been inconsistent, incomplete, and ineffective (Tullipano & Lundy-Ponce, 1999).

The consequences of becoming a dropout are serious for the Native American student and the country. With the dropout rate remaining high, Native Americans will become further economically disenfranchised and impoverished. Students with no diploma will have lower wages, higher unemployment, lower status, more discrimination, loss of self worth and self-esteem. It is likely that Indian communities will continue to live in abject poverty and hopelessness, becoming more dependent on federally provided social services (Tullipano & Lundy-Ponce, 1999).

#### Need for the Study

The history of Indian Education has in the past been dismal for many Native Americans. Many had to overcome big obstacles such as poverty and a nomadic family life style. Others have overcome horrific boarding school experiences, extended separation from family, and being deprived of their language and culture. Some have found a way to persist on their own.

Successful Native Americans must have the opportunity to tell the stories of their successes. Only by sharing their experiences and acting as role models (intentionally or unintentionally), will the need for policy be confirmed. Native American parents can be enlightened through these stories about how important a role they play in getting their children to complete high school and pursue higher education. Teachers need to hear the stories and believe that a first or second grader will remember their names and what they



did for them thirty years after having contact with them. If only that teacher could have seen the face of the participant who spoke about how she taught him to set goals in the first grade and how he still lives his life by what she taught him. Today this Native American student is a successful, compassionate school administrator.

Faculty and mentors must hear the stories where the participants revealed how important it was that “he remembered my name from the first day” or “he invited me to his home for supper with his family” or “he stayed after hours and drilled me until I knew the material and then played a game of chess with me to help me unwind.” These little acts of kindness made all the difference to the student, made them feel special, made them want to be successful.

Administrators need to hear how important it was for all of the participants to have an Indian cultural center on their campus. Indian students need a place to call their home away from home, a place to unwind with others like themselves, others who came from a reservation way of life. The participants recognized the need to be part of the diverse population of the campuses they attended, but administrators and policy makers need to hear and understand that Native American students on a predominately non-Indian campus need a place where they can feel safe and part of a “family.”

Administrators and faculty must hear the stories about how the participants of this study felt they were successful because of the Indian support groups which these students formed or groups in which they participated. The participants tell about how they “might not have survived without the support of my on-campus Indian family” or “I was so

depressed without an Indian community to be part of that I thought about dropping out until I just went ahead and started an Indian group on my own.”

Finally, parents, teachers, faculty, mentors, administrators and all potential students must hear how important participation in extra-curricular activities was to the academic success of the participants in this study. For many, it was also the key to social success and an introduction to group participation which is important for academic success. The current literature supports what the participants reported were the reasons for their success and will be addressed in Chapter V.

### Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand the academic experience of ten successful Native American professionals from kindergarten through completion of a terminal degree in their chosen academic area. Qualitative research methods were used for the study including participant observation, formal interviews, and follow-up telephone interviews. Specifics about the research process are discussed in greater detail in Chapter II.

The study began with one question to the participants. Can you tell me all you remember about your academic experience beginning in kindergarten and ending with your terminal degree? The question was broad and open-ended which allowed other questions to emerge as the interview progressed. After the second interview, a pattern began to emerge and I was able to ask the individual to “tell me more about your teachers” or “tell me more about the activities you participated in.”

### Delimitations

The participants in the study were all from the Upper Midwest of the United States. The study is therefore not generalizable to all Native American students across the United States.

### Organization of the study

Chapter I of this study provides the reader with an overview of the problem of Native American dropouts and the consequences of dropping out to the Native American student and the reservation population. It also includes a discussion of the need, the purpose, the delimitation of the study, and the brief statement of findings.

Chapter II describes the methodology used for this study. Because it is an inductive study, the methodology design chapter occurs early in the study instead of the usual literature review. The reader will find a discussion of the fundamentals of qualitative research and a rationale for choosing qualitative research for this study. The interview techniques, triangulation, authenticity, negotiating entry into the setting, establishing rapport with the participants, and inductive data analysis will also be described.

Chapter III provides a narrative description of the context and individual backgrounds of the participants in the study. The first section provides personal information about each individual interviewed. The second section describes the participant's educational experiences over as many years as it took to complete kindergarten through a terminal degree.



Chapter IV identifies five themes and other common features that emerged from data collected through in-depth interviews with the ten participants and from the data analysis. It also included evidence to support the developed themes.

Chapter V is a review of the literature in reference to the themes. The themes are listed with a discussion of related literature for each theme.

Chapter VI included a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

### Operational Definitions

**Participant-** An individual who agreed to be part of the study and signed a participant release form.

**Interview Schedule-** Non-leading questions which were prepared to gain detail and clarification about the participants background. Some questions were used only to stimulate conversation if the interviewee had trouble getting started or remembering intimate details.

**Native American/ American Indian-** Individual who is identified by law as “full” or of “mixed Indian blood.” “Mixed blood” Native Americans are those who are enrolled members of a tribe recognized by the federal government and /or those who have “one-fourth degree of Native American blood.” This also includes Eskimo or Aleut or other Alaskan natives. Other acceptable terms for Native American are Indian and American Indian.

**Faculty member-** Full time, tenured employee of a university with teaching responsibilities.

**Mentor-** A wise and trusted teacher, counselor, professor, or other faculty member.

**Indian reservation-** Designated land areas assigned to and/or controlled by Native Americans as determined by treaty or executive action of the United States government.

**Indian country-** A loosely used phrase to identify a geographic area occupied by a significant number of Native American individuals or families.

**Drop out-** The act of leaving high school or college before graduation.

**Dropout-** A person who leaves or drops out of high school or college before graduation.

**“Stop-out”-** The act of leaving school for an unspecified amount of time before returning and graduating.

**Success-** Can be defined in many ways and must depend upon personal, individual, and cultural values. In western culture, success is measured by quantified steps; and there is always a built-in frustration factor because perfect success is never achieved. In Native American culture success is always achieved, because humans never stops learning . The idea is that a human just cannot help but to learn, and whatever new knowledge or ability he learns can always be labeled as success. According to Haller and Aitken, (1990 p. 91), “It might be argued that the Indian point of view is oriented toward success whereas the western view appears to emphasize failure.”(p.91). In this study, success means the completion of the attempted doctoral academic degree.

**Failure-** Is the absence of success. In this study, failure means never finishing the attempted academic degree. Failure does not apply to those students who simply stopped out for individual reasons and returned at a later date to complete the attempted academic degree.

The following chapter provides a discussion of the methodology used for the study. This includes explanations about inductive qualitative research methods and those that were specifically employed in this study.



## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will discuss the fundamentals of qualitative research and provide a rationale for choosing inductive qualitative research for this study. The interview techniques, triangulation, authenticity, negotiating entry into the setting, establishing rapport with the participants, and inductive data analysis will also be described.

#### Qualitative Research

Because I believe that qualitative research methods fit best with the topic of this dissertation, I will begin with a comparison between qualitative research and the more statistical quantitative approach to help the reader understand why I chose this method. (Use of the personal pronoun is commonly used in qualitative studies because the researcher is an integral part of the process).

#### A Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Research

There are many definitions of qualitative and quantitative research which exist in the literature. Four main texts offer excellent summaries of the comparison of qualitative and quantitative research. The first, *Understanding and Conducting Qualitative Research*, by Stainback & Stainback (1988) lists ten dimensions which are summarized below:

1. Purpose: The purpose of quantitative research is to understand the cause and effect relationship between two or more predetermined variables. In contrast, qualitative

research “seeks to understand people’s interpretations and perceptions” of the researched topic.

2. Reality: Quantitative researchers suggest that there is a common, known, and unchanging reality. Qualitative researchers believe in a changing reality based on perceptions.

3. Viewpoint: Quantitative researchers maintain an objective or “outsider’s” point of view. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, adopt an “insider’s” viewpoint which is based on the relationships they develop through observations, interviews, and general participation in the research process.

4. Values: Quantitative researchers strive to be objective and to report facts in a cause and effect format. Qualitative researchers believe that research is “value bound” and that the values of the researcher must be considered while conducting the research and also in reporting the results.

5. Focus: Methodologies that are carefully selected and structured are essential to quantitative studies; holistic methods that look at a given situation from varying perspectives and research formats are necessary in qualitative studies.

6. Orientation: Quantitative studies have a predetermined hypothesis which will be verified or disproved with carefully defined methodology; qualitative studies tend to be “discovery oriented,” with flexible methodology (redirection of the study may occur during data collection) depending on the analysis of incoming data.

7. Data: Data in quantitative studies tend to be objective and interpretable through statistical findings. Qualitative researchers focus on subjective data or data based on the researchers' and/or the subjects' perceptions of reality.

8. Instrumentation: Traditional or objective methods for record keeping are employed in quantitative studies; the researcher is the "instrument" in qualitative studies.

9. Conditions: The environmental conditions for quantitative research are predetermined and controlled by the researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher is present in a "natural setting" without control over naturally occurring events

10. Results: Quantitative studies focus on reliability and replicability of the study. Qualitative studies concentrate on validity or "data that represents [sic] a true or full picture of what the researcher is investigating." Qualitative researchers seek to gather a deep and full understanding of the data (Stainback and Stainback 1988, pp.4-9).

The second text which offers an excellent comparison of qualitative and quantitative methodology is found in Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. They state:

The word qualitative implies an emphasis on process and meanings that are not rigorously examined, or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, and intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal



relationships between variables, not processes. Inquiry is purported to be within a value-free framework (p.4).

The third text, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* provides the following information. As social and contextual phenomena emerge in the research setting, qualitative methodology is designed to help the researcher understand and report what is happening. The following ten themes provide a condensed research description of a qualitative design (Patton, 1990):

1. Naturalistic inquiry which studies real world situations as they unfold naturally; non-manipulative, unobtrusive, and non-controlling; openness to whatever emerges - lack of predetermined constraints on outcomes;
2. Inductive analysis which provides immersion into the details and specifics of the data to discover important categories, dimensions, and interrelationships; begin by exploring genuinely open questions rather than testing theoretically derived (deductive) hypotheses;
3. Holistic perspective which considers that the whole phenomenon under study is understood as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts; focus on complex interdependencies not meaningfully reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships;
4. Qualitative data which is detailed, thick description; inquiry in depth; direct quotations, capturing people's personal perspectives and experiences;

5. The researcher has personal contact and insight allowing closeness with the participants, situation, and phenomenon under study; researcher's personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon;

6. Dynamic systems which give attention to process; assumes change is constant and ongoing whether the focus is on an individual or an entire culture;

7. Unique case orientation which assumes each case is special and unique; the first level of inquiry is being true to, respecting, and capturing the details of the individual cases being studied; cross-case analysis follow from and depends on the quality of individual case studies;

8. Context sensitivity which places finding in a social, historical, and temporal context; dubious of the possibility or meaningfulness of generalizations across time and space;

9. Empathetic neutrality where complete objectivity is impossible; pure subjectivity undermines credibility; the researcher's passion in understanding the world in all its complexity - not proving something, not advocating, not advancing personal agendas, but understanding; the researcher includes personal experience and empathic insight as part of the relevant data, while taking a neutral nonjudgmental stance toward whatever content may emerge;

10. Design flexibility which is open to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change; avoids getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness; pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge (pp. 40-41).

The fourth text, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers, An Introduction* by Glesne and Peshkin (1992) provided a table which summarizes the points made above. They have made the following comparisons:

### **Quantitative Mode**

#### ***Assumptions***

Social facts have an objective reality

Primacy of method

Variables can be identified and  
relationships measured

Etic (outsider's point of view)

#### ***Purpose***

Generalizability

Prediction

Causal explanations

#### ***Approach***

Begins with hypotheses and theories

Manipulation and control

Uses formal instruments

Experimentation

Deductive

Component analysis

### **Qualitative Mode**

Reality is socially constructed

Primacy of subject matter

Variables are complex, interwoven,  
difficult to measure

Emic (insider's point of view)

Contextualization

Interpretation

Understanding actors' perspectives

Ends with hypotheses and grounded  
theory

Emergence and portrayal

Researcher as instrument

Naturalistic

Inductive

Searches for patterns



Seeks consensus, the norm	Seeks pluralism, complexity
Reduces data to numerical indices	Makes minor use of numerical indices
Abstract language in write-up	Descriptive write-up

### ***Researcher Role***

Detachment and impartiality	Personal involvement and partiality
Objective portrayal	Empathic understanding (p. 7).

To further support the use of qualitative methodology for this dissertation, the concept of grounded theory used in qualitative methodology must be explained. Strauss and Corbin (1990) say it best:

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area allowed to emerge.

### **Issues Regarding Legitimacy of Qualitative Research.**

There are a number of issues which are raised in doing qualitative research in a world dominated by a quantitative paradigm. These are discussed in the following section.

Reliability. Researchers are mindful of the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data in qualitative studies. Researchers usually view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study. Two researchers

observing a single setting can come up with different data and produce different findings and both of these studies can be reliable. The question of reliability of one or both would only come up if one or both of the studies yielded contradictory or incompatible results (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

According to Guba & Lincoln (1981),

1. Reliability relates to the ability to replicate the study under similar circumstances. The qualitative researcher's consistent data coding provides help for others to understand the themes and reach similar conclusions.
2. Internal validity is concerned with validity as a causal inference. Credibility, or truth value, is achieved in qualitative inquiry through structural corroboration, such as persistent observation, triangulation, or peer debriefing.
3. External validity is considered the generalizability of a study's findings. The qualitative study occurs with a specific setting, with a relatively small number of subjects, thus providing a "thick description" of events, situations, behaviors, as well as participants' direct quotations regarding their experiences, and beliefs. The methodologies employed in this study were based upon qualitative inquiry.

In this dissertation, the use of qualitative interview methods were employed.

The use of an inductive, naturalistic interview method of data collection guarded against any preconceived opinions that might prematurely narrow the data (Bogdan & Biklan, 1982).

According to Kvale, (1996), the aspects of qualitative research interviews are as follows:

*Life World.* The topic of qualitative interviews is the everyday lived world of the interviewee and his or her relation to it.

*Meaning.* The interview seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject. The interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said as well as how it is said.

*Qualitative.* The interview seeks qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language, it does not aim at quantification.

*Descriptive.* The interview attempts to obtain open nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the subject's life worlds.

*Specificity.* Descriptions of specific situations and action sequences are elicited, not general opinions.

*Deliberate Naivete.* The interviewer exhibits an openness to new and unexpected phenomena, rather than having ready-made categories and schemes of interpretation.

*Focused.* The interview is focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standardized questions, or entirely "non-directive."

*Ambiguity.* Interviewee statements can sometimes be ambiguous, reflecting contradictions in the world the subject lives in.



*Change.* The process of being interviewed may produce new insights and awareness, and the subject may in the course of the interview come to change his or her descriptions and meaning about a theme.

*Sensitivity.* Different interviewers can produce different statements on the same themes, depending on their sensitivity to and knowledge of the interview topic.

*Interpersonal Situation.* The knowledge obtained is produced through the interpersonal interaction in the interview.

*Positive Experience.* A well carried out research interview can be a rare and enriching experience for the interviewee, who may obtain new insights into his or her life situation (Kvale, 1996, pp.30-31).

The qualitative interview approach is indeed very different from established modes of social scientific research.

### Validity.

Validity using the interview method is addressed all through my investigation with the emphasis on validation “moved from inspection at the end of the production line to quality control throughout the stages of knowledge production (Kvale, 1996, p.236).

Validation occurs at seven stages of the investigation according to Kvale (1996);

1. *Thematizing.* The validity of an investigation rests on the soundness of the theoretical presuppositions of a study and on the logic of the derivations from theory to the research questions of the study.

2. *Designing.* The validity of the knowledge produced depends on the adequacy of the design and the methods used for the subject matter and purpose of the study.



From an ethical perspective, a valid research design involves beneficence-producing knowledge beneficial to the human situation while minimizing harmful consequences.

3. *Interviewing*. Validity here pertains to the trustworthiness of the subject's reports and the quality of the interviewing itself, which should include a careful questioning as to the meaning of what is said and a continual checking of the information obtained as a validation in situations.
4. *Transcribing*. The question of what constitutes a valid translation from oral to written language is involved in the choice of linguistic style for the transcript.
5. *Analyzing*. This has to do with whether the questions put to an interview text are valid and whether the logic of the interpretations is sound.
6. *Validating*. This entails a reflected judgement as to what forms of validation are relevant to a specific study, the application of the concrete procedures of validation, and a decision on what the appropriate community is for a dialogue on validity.
7. *Reporting*. This involves the question of whether a given report is a valid account of the main findings of a study, as well as the role of the readers of the reporting validating the results (p.237).

Validity can best be described as "the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure" (Cohen & Spenciner, 1994, p.114). Stainback and Stainback (1988) provide a similar definition in referring to validity as the "fit between what is intended to be studied and what actually is studied" (p.97). McMillan & Schumacher (1989) provide yet more insight when they claim internal validity is considered to be a strength of qualitative

research given the extended time period for data collection and reliance on the actual words of the participants.

### Triangulation

Delamont (1992) identifies three basic types of triangulation: a) Between method or getting data with more than one method. b) Between investigators or involving more than one person examining the phenomenon or setting and c) Within method or getting several types of data on a topic within your method. When a variety of data gathering techniques are used, such as qualitative inquiry; participant observation, interviewing, and document collection, the researcher can confirm or disconfirm patterns by comparing and contrasting the various types of data (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). For example, information shared during interviews can be compared across interviews.

### Rationale for Choice of Methodology

The purpose of this study is to better understand the educational experience of successful Native Americans who have completed a Ph.D., Ed.D., J.D., or M.D. to determine what might be different about their experience from the students who drop out and never return. I believe that the qualitative research method was the most appropriate method for this study. Reichardt and Cook (1979) indicate that qualitative methods are best used when the researcher had the task of “discovering or generating theories” (p.17). This was certainly my task as I have very few preconceived ideas of how their experiences might be different from others.

“In qualitative research you are not putting together a puzzle, whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture which takes shape as you collect and

examine the parts” (Bogdan and Bilken, 1982, p.20). The end results of qualitative research using the interview method are often a surprise as they emerge, are transcribed, and analyzed.

### Procedural Design

#### Choosing the Topic

Over the past 14 years, I have become interested in learning more about my own Native American heritage. I was not born on a reservation nor raised in a traditional Native American family. My Native American mother had a college degree and worked as a registered nurse most of her life. Her parents wanted her to raise her family away from the poverty of the reservation. Because of the mainstream direction my life took, I learned very little about being an Indian. As I yearned for knowledge about my heritage I began taking classes in Indian Studies. Many of the courses contained sections related to Indian education and repeated the same fact: a large percentage of Native American students are not successful in their attempts to complete high school or college educations. I was interested in the reasons for this from the first time I heard the statistics. Tierney (1992) wrote,

Although researchers differ about the precise percentages Native Americans who attend college, everyone is in agreement about gross averages, and those averages highlight problems throughout the academic pipeline. If one hundred students are in the ninth grade, about sixty of them will graduate from high school, and about twenty will enter academe. Of those twenty students only about three will eventually receive a four-year degree (p. 605).



This might explain why on a national scale, in 1994-1995, 44,446 Doctorates were awarded and only 130 or 0.3% were awarded to Native Americans (Pavel, 1999).

Much of the research focuses on the negative statistics which indicate the high numbers of American Indian high school and college dropouts. I will address the literature related to those themes that the participants in this dissertation study claim made them successful. Thus began my journey to record the academic life stories of 10 successful Native American professionals. I hoped they would tell me what made them different from those who are not as successful.

### Choosing the Participants

After the idea of interviewing successful Native American professionals began to form, I began a search for a sample. I learned of several professionals working within a reasonable travel distance from my campus and started to make a list. Once I had 20 names I decided to contact 10 of the names on the list. The only limitation placed on the participants was that they had to have completed a terminal degree in their field. I reached them by telephone and proposed the topic and interview request. Five men and five women agreed immediately to participate.

The next step was preparing a consent form letter (see Appendix A) which indicated the scope of the research, that the interviews would be audiotaped and later transcribed, and that their identity would be disguised with the use of pseudonyms. The signed consent forms were in hand and the interview dates were set. I asked each participant to be interviewed in a setting which was comfortable for them. In this case, negotiating entry was easy; there were no gatekeepers. As professionals with a vested



interest in helping increase the numbers of Native Americans in academia, they were all eager to make a contribution.

### Collection of Data

There are three types of interviews qualitative researchers engage in. (Delamont, 1992; Glesne & Peskin, 1992). The first is the 'interview' that is done while observation is going on, when quick questions are put to informants about what is happening. Then there is the more formal interview, perhaps tape recorded, where a check list of questions is covered. Finally, there is the life history interview, which may take repeated visits and many hours (or even years) (p.109).

This dissertation employed the life history interview directly focused on educational experiences. The interviews ranged from four to five working hours with a follow-up telephone interview which was about 30 minutes in length to clarify statements and to fill in missing dates or facts. It cannot be stressed enough how eager the participants were to contribute to this project.

### Establishing Rapport

Developing rapport with the participants was a very easy process. I was familiar with several of the participants before they were selected which increased their comfort level. However, all the participants were open and willing to share their histories because they felt their contribution might lead to educational planning which could lead to future success of more Native American students. Spradley (1979) notes that rapport means a level of trust has developed which will allow for the free flow of information (p.79). The participants' level of trust was high as they shared intimate, often intense, and emotional

memories about their educational experience which they hadn't thought about in years. Delamont (1992) tells of a researcher who did not tape because she found that taping impeded the rapport. I did not find taping to be a distraction for any of the participants.

### Observation

Observation was not a formal part of this study. Informally, I did make notes as I listened to indicate a participant's demeanor. This was important because during some of the interviews participants cried as they were reliving some experiences. This information would have been lost in the transcription phase. During the interviews, I was observing the setting and relating the environment to the personalities of the participants. Later I made notes about what I had observed and used these notes in the description of the context and individual background.

### Interviews

An interview schedule of questions was prepared (see Appendix B ). Questions were divided into three parts as a general outline to follow if the interviewee had trouble remembering intimate details at the beginning of the interviews. I wanted them to tell me about their experience in grade school, junior high/high school, and college. Since this is qualitative research my questions were prepared only to gain details and clarification.

Glesne & Peshkin (1992) suggest three types of interviewing questions. They are:

1. Structured. You have specified questions you know you want to ask;
2. Open. You are prepared to follow unexpected leads that arise in the course of your interviewing; and

3. Depth probing. You pursue all points of interest with various expressions that mean "tell me more" and "explain."

The intent of such interviewing is to capture the unseen that was, is, will be, or should be; how respondents think or feel about something; and how they explain or account for something. Such a broad-scale approach to understanding is drawn from the assumption that qualitative research, notably nonreductionist, is directed to understanding phenomena in their fullest possible complexity. The elaborated responses you hear provide the affective and cognitive underpinnings of your respondents' perceptions. With this picture you have obtained what is characteristic of qualitative inquiry; the native's point of view (p.92).

The interview schedule I prepared listed general background information questions which would fill in blanks if they were left out of the educational life history the participant was telling me. Once the participants began speaking and remembering, their conversation flowed freely. There were many opportunities to use Glesne & Peshkin's depth probing method of asking the participant to "tell me more" or please "explain." In this study face to face interviews took place during the spring and summer of 1997. The interviews ranged from four to six hours in length.

### Data Analysis

Delamont (1992) provides a list of basic rules to follow when analyzing data.

Although these methods are used on ethnographic field notes, they can also be effective for analyzing interview data. Analysis of all qualitative data must continue all through the research process.



1. Never let data accumulate without preliminary analysis.
2. Index your data as you go; do not allow the data to pile up without knowing what you have collected.
3. Generate themes and categories as you go along, and review them frequently. It is better to have too many categories which you recombine later than to have too few.
4. Index and code your data densely; do not try to summarize them under just a few themes. Generate as many codes as you can; be 'wild' if you can.
5. Sort your data into files (either physically cutting up copies, or 'cutting and pasting' in the wordprocessor). Keep sorting and reviewing your files, in itself that can be a process of discovery.
6. Every now and then, stop and think. Do not go on mechanically working on the data without reflecting on where you are going and how you are getting there.
7. Write analytic memoranda as often as you can. Analytic memos or short notes to yourself and your supervisor in which you review what you are doing, why you are doing it, where you are going next etc.
8. Every time you make a decision, write it down and put it in your 'methods' file.
9. Try to enjoy the work. It should be an intellectually engaging and creative exercise, not a chore.
10. Read other people's work – for ideas, models, parallels, contrasts, metaphors, models.



11. Read the methodological literature properly and think about how it can inform your work – do not just read it to justify what you are doing anyway (p151).

After the first two interviews it became clear to me that there were a lot of personal details to manage about each participant, so I designed a chart to fill in the information such as date of birth, the number of siblings, or the year each degree was completed. Each set of interview notes were kept in separate file folders for each participant. Experience from previous projects taught me this management lesson well.

I used a professional transcription service from a community removed from the participants' locals. It was very costly since there were many hours of tape recorded sessions. However, it was well worth the expense. While reading and re-reading the transcripts, I found that there were some blank spots that made it necessary for me to listen to the tapes again to fill in the missing text.

Once I began reading the transcripts I wrote notes in the margins. Miles and Huberman (1994) provide the basic steps to coding, categorizing, and developing thematic statements for qualitative research through reflection, sorting, building categories, and generating theories. Following their directions, I wrote code words in the left hand margins often writing reflections and other notations in the right-hand margin. I then started a sorting process which allowed me to identify similar phrases, relationships, patterns, themes, differences or sequences. While sorting I was able to isolate similar patterns and commonalities and differences in order to compare them between interview texts and to the follow-up telephone interview. Groups of consistent data began to stand out as themes which lead to the possibility of my generating theory from this grouped data.

### Coding, Categories and Themes

Kvale, (1996) begins data sorting with “meaning condensation which entails an abridgement of the meanings by the interviewees into shorter formulations” (p.193). The idea is to take long statements or blocks of text and condense it into brief statements or words. This process is identified by Miles and Huberman (1994) as *coding*. Coding allows you to sort through your data meaningfully while keeping the context intact. Coding, “...is the central process by which theories are built from data” (Straus and Corbin, 1990, p.57). Coding leads to the meaning categorization.

Meaning categorization, according to Kvale (1996), “implies that the interview is coded into categories which can arise ad hoc during the analysis” (p.192). The categorization of meaning has long been used for analyzing qualitative material. During the categorization of code words, themes begin to emerge. This emergence of themes through an inductive research process is called “grounded theory” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). They assert that grounded theory is discovered from systematic collection of data, which leads to relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications. It is my intention to use my research conclusions to propose recommendations for the future retention of Native American students. The initial list of code words was collapsed into categories, which lead to the development of five major themes. Below is a demonstration of how the process worked using **theme three**; The participants had a positive self-image which contributed to a successful academic experience.

**Figure 1: ONE EXAMPLE OF THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS PROCESS*****CODES:***

Good Student  
I was gifted  
Self confident  
Needed challenge  
Worthy Person

Had good skills  
Honor student  
Self-esteem  
Proud  
Good memory

Liked school  
Loved school  
Enjoyed school  
Achieved  
Teacher's pet

I was independent  
Self motivated  
I was intelligent  
I was bright  
I was Valedictorian

I was a star  
Teachers liked me  
I was successful  
I got good grades  
School was easy

***CATEGORY:***

**ATTITUDE TOWARD SELF**

***THEME:***

**The participants had a positive self-image which contributed to a successful academic experience.**



From these categories the following five themes and other common features emerged.

**Theme One:** The value of education was highly stressed by the participant, his/her family, and mentors all through the educational experience.

**Theme Two:** A strong faculty member/ mentor and Native American support system (often called a community) were available and very important to the participants as they progressed to the completion of their terminal degree.

**Theme Three:** The participants had a positive self-image which contributed to a successful academic experience.

**Theme Four:** The participants describe themselves as self-disciplined and/or goal-oriented.

**Theme Five:** The participants engaged in extra-curricular activities during their schooling which enhanced their academic experience.

**Other Common Features:** First, all but one participant "stopped-out" at least one time during their educational experience. Second, the participants were products of public, private, or parochial education during their preparatory years. These features were revealed in the context of the participants' background information. However, none of them discussed these topics to the extent that these would warrant identification as themes.

These themes will be presented in detail in the next chapters.

Chapter II described the fundamentals of qualitative research and provided a rationale for choosing inductive qualitative research. Chapter III will provide a narrative description of the participants and their individual background information.



## CHAPTER III

### CONTEXTS AND BACKGROUNDS OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

#### Introduction

Chapter III provides a narrative description of the participants and their individual background. Information drawn from each interview will provide information about the interview setting, participant's background, and the participant's educational experiences as follows:

1. The first section provides personal information on each individual interviewed in this study;
2. The second section describes the participant's educational experiences over as many years as it took to complete kindergarten through a terminal degree.

At their request, the majority of the interviews took place in the participants place of occupation. There were three exceptions, one interview was conducted in my home, the other two in the participant's home. After an interview schedule was established, it was necessary to travel to fairly remote locations from Wisconsin to Montana. All participants in this study have been assigned pseudonyms. Unless in quotation marks, the voice of the participant is in italics.

Regan Birch

Regan Birch, who identifies himself as a "Woodland" Indian from a northern reservation was the first interview participant. The interview took place in what would later become his office on a mid-sized university campus in the Midwest. Regan was very relaxed in this setting and very willing to speak about his educational background and educational experiences.

Regan's memories of his educational experiences were very pleasant. He attended Catholic schools where he described himself as being poor but not different from others. Although Regan lived on an Indian reservation for months at a time, he never had a permanent home there.

Regan's mother left high school in the tenth grade, but his father graduated from high school and took up a career in the military. His grandmother was a high school graduate which was unusual for an Indian woman of her generation. He has one biological sister who earned an Associates Degree. Education was important to the family, and he was always expected to graduate from high school and go to college.

Regan attended six different grade schools because of his father's military career. He really enjoyed school because his broad experience in all these schools put him in the top 10% of his class. The teachers encouraged him by letting him do advanced work, and he enjoyed being singled out. In seventh grade he attended school in Asia which he calls a "magnificent experience."

In high school Regan was put on a college track, and teachers encouraged him to take foreign languages and math. He also took the college classes that his high school

offered with college credit. Regan participated in extracurricular sports activities playing football, baseball, track, and basketball.

Regan graduated from high school in 1960. He attended college in the deep south and graduated with a B.A. in history in 1964. He received a master's degree in history in 1966 and his Ph.D. in history in 1969 both from an eastern university. Regan is working in his degree field, and although he is not working for his reservation or tribe, he is working for Indian people as he does consulting work and teaching for many different tribes.

#### Gene Lone Oak

The second interview was with Gene Lone Oak and took place in his office at his place of employment on a rather small, rural, university campus in the Midwest. Gene directs a large program for members of a minority group. His office is located in a cultural center designed to be a home away from home for members of this cultural group. Gene was very direct and willing to share his personal and educational background. During this long interview, Gene answered phone calls but always returned his full attention to the interview process, picking up right where he left off.

Gene is an enrolled member on a Northern Plains reservation. He attended a public school just off the reservation. He remembers liking school, but in his early years he had feelings of fear and intimidation stating, "other students always knew how you were doing in class. Kids will know on their own which kids are really bright and which ones are average. I had a feeling that I didn't want to be in the lower category. So, I worked hard."

Gene's family is a well educated one. His mother graduated from high school and his father has an associate degree. He has one sister with an associate degree, a second sister



has her M.A. in the health field, another sister has a R.N. degree, and a brother has a two year vocational degree. Gene said "education was something that was instilled in us by our parents and maybe seeing all my sisters achieve and do well added something."

Gene remembers liking school but liking high school the most. He remembers the competitiveness in classes and said, "I didn't like it but I did really really well. The grade school was a competitive school, and it was something that was instilled in all the kids to be the best, and I think I gained from that." Gene said high school was also a good experience. He got good comments on his writing skills and made the honor roll, noting that "that was a good feeling." He felt the teachers encouraged the competitiveness too much sometimes. He stated:

*I remember in Algebra class, Mr. Smith used to put students from the smartest group to the less bright in rows in the class . I was always in the middle. In fact there was this girl, Janey, and she would switch every time there was a test. I don't think that there was ever anybody in-between us. She and I competed. I can remember that I used to feel so bad for the other kids that they were way in the back and I didn't like that.*

Gene really felt that the competition was a bad thing in principle, but that it did help to make students successful.

Gene graduated from high school in 1967, then attended a two year college and earned an associate in Liberal Arts degree in 1969. He finished his B.S. degree in education at a four year college in 1972. Gene finished his M.Ed. degree in 1974 and his Ed.D. in 1981. He is working in his degree field and although he is not working for his

reservation or tribe he is working for Indian people as he does consulting work for many different tribes and tribal colleges.

### Darcy Willow

Darcy Willow, an enrolled member of a Northern Plains reservation, attended both public and mission schools as a child. Darcy comes from a well educated family. Both parents graduated from high school and promoted higher education for their children. Seven siblings have college degrees.

The interview took place on a small college campus in the north. Darcy was very relaxed and willing to share his school experiences. His office was all that is befitting a college president. There were many American Indian cultural artifacts among the books. His work table desk filled the room and was covered with papers and student files. This was a busy, confident man.

Darcy talked at length about moving many times as a child, attending different schools. His diverse schooling and exposure to many cultures was seen as an asset. Darcy graduated from high school in 1964. He attended a trade school in 1965 and worked as a carpenter. In 1966 Darcy enlisted in the military service and spent two years in the Navy. He continued his education after his military experience and graduated with a B.S. in secondary education in 1972. In May of 1973, Darcy completed his M.A. degree in counseling and guidance and immediately began a Ph.D. program in educational administration. After completing one year he "stopped out" for several years before being awarded a Bush scholarship and returning to finish his Ph.D. in 1996.



Darcy remembers that he did not like school at first, but said he was a good student. He credits his success in school to a good military experience and a structured home life. His favorite teacher was Japanese and he said he was encouraged and helped by the teachers. Darcy returned to his reservation, working as a college administrator in the area in which he completed his terminal degree.

### Rodney Pine

Rodney Pine is an enrolled member of a tribe located in the Northern Plains. His parents are from different tribes and he refers to himself as "the product of the passion between two people from two different nations."

The interview took place in Rodney's office at the grade school where he is the principal. Several times during the interview he was called on to administer to children and to office staff. The interview was relaxed and light as I have known Rodney for many years. There was some discussion about the confidentiality of what he was about to expose about himself to me, and I assured him that his identity would be disguised. Rodney grew up in a well educated family who valued education. He has lived on the reservation all his life, attending grade and high school at reservation public schools. A strict school regimen taught him self-discipline and the benefit of goal setting as early as first grade.

Rodney's parents are both professionals. He has two sisters with college degrees and two brothers with high school diplomas. His family stressed education as a way to get ahead in life and really pushed him in school. Rodney felt he was a very good student, full of self confidence as he stated, "I knew early I am the answer to my success."



After Rodney graduated from high school in 1972, he started college the following fall. He earned his B.S. in elementary education from a small northern university in 1976. Following his graduation, Rodney enlisted in the military service and spent four years as an officer. The military experience was good in that it taught him self-discipline and reinforced his strong work ethic. Upon returning to his home reservation, Rodney worked for awhile and then moved south to start a master's degree program in 1981. He completed his M.A. in educational administration (in record time) one year later in 1982. He started his Ph.D. program immediately, but he soon lost interest and "stopped out" for several years. Rodney said "I got my master's degree and I got treated with a whole lot of respect, but I didn't have a whole lot of experience in education so I took a job." He was recruited back into the doctoral program when a mentor from that program told him "I believe that you are ready to earn a doctorate." Rodney said he agreed with the mentor and returned to receive his Ph.D. three years later in 1996. Today Rodney works on his home reservation as a school principal and looks forward to becoming an instructor in higher education when he is ready for a change.

#### Don Aspen

Don Aspen holds a Ph.D. in psychology. He is an enrolled member of one plains tribe but grew up on another plains tribal reservation and has lived on and off the reservation during his life. The interview took place in his office and like the others before him, his office looked the part of a busy school administrator. Don was very relaxed and open in his demeanor. He was willing to share the intimate details of his public school education.

Don's father has a doctorate and was a strong role model in the completion of his own academic career. Don's mother completed high school and his only sibling holds a master's degree. The family was well educated and although they did not push him into higher education, Don learned vicariously, through example, to succeed on his own. He did, however, mention that the tribe where he grew up was a very strong advocate for education, sending officers right into homes to take students to school if they missed. Don remembers his educational support came more from his extended family and the Indian community.

Don graduated from high school in 1979 and enlisted in the military service and served four years in the Navy. He began college at a small southern plains school in 1984 and finished his B.S. in psychology and anthropology four years later in 1988. Don went right into the master's program in psychology and finished in record time one year later and entered his Ph.D. program that same year. He received his Ph.D. in psychology in 1992.

Don works at a small rural university as a professor and director of a successful program for Native American students pursuing doctorates in psychology. He is working in the area of his Ph.D. and although he is not working on his home reservation he is working for and with Indian people.

#### Elaine Chestnut

Elaine Chestnut identifies herself as an enrolled member of a northern Minnesota reservation. Elaine agreed to the interview and asked me to meet her on the reservation where she was employed as an attorney. Her office, cool and bright, was decorated with Indian artifacts. You could see we were in the north woods as you looked out the window.



At first she was worried that we might be interrupted. I assured her that we would take as long as she had to spare and that she could end the interview at any time. We then eased into the interview.

Elaine comes from a family which valued education. Both parents and eight siblings have college degrees. Elaine stated that her father was a strict disciplinarian with a strong Catholic upbringing which he passed on to his children. She remembers when she started school how her parents reinforced and praised her for getting good grades. Elaine said, "I really identified a lot with school. You know, it was my way of saying 'this is who I am.' I can learn and I can express myself. It was a really good experience."

Elaine attended reservations schools until the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. She knew that school on the reservation was not challenging her and she was becoming bored, so she took an opportunity to go to a boarding school where she had to work much harder (after coming from a school with much lower standards). She was well liked and favored by the teachers.

Elaine graduated from high school in 1972 and started college in 1973. She "stopped out" to work several times, and did not complete her B.A. in political science until 1985. The following fall Elaine started law school and earned her J.D. in 1988. Today she is working for her reservation as an attorney.

#### Linda Basswood

Linda Basswood is an enrolled member of a Woodland tribe. Linda came to my lake home to be interviewed. We were alone for the several hours necessary to complete the chatty interview. Linda was quite relaxed and open about what she was sharing, even though it was obvious some of the memories were painful.



Linda was not born on the reservation but attended schools in communities located close to the reservation. She was raised in a single parent family, abandoned by her father shortly before she was born. Her mother and sisters prepared her for school. Her mother died while she was very young and an older sister took over the responsibility for raising the family. Linda remembers that her oldest sister really stressed the need to go to school and get an education. She stated, "Even though, at that point, I was really resisting anything that she told me, obviously something stuck and kept me going to school." Mentors and the Upward Bound program helped her to realize she could "complete school and do something with her life."

Linda graduated from a private high school on the east coast and returned home to work for one year before starting college at a small northern Minnesota school. She graduated from college with a B.S. and was encouraged by mentors and teachers to pursue the dream of becoming an attorney. She graduated and passed her bar exam the first time she took it. Today Linda is an attorney working for her tribe.

#### Rena Hemlock

Rena Hemlock is an enrolled member of a Woodland tribe. Although she never lived on the reservation, her family and extended family lived in a mining town not far from the reservation where there was work. Rena remembers that the family houses lined the street and it was like having their own reservation.

This interview took place in Rena's home, a regal home in the old part of the city. It was very tastefully decorated with Indian art and books everywhere. Rena agreed to the interview after I explained to her that I was in the city after I had been displaced by the Red

River Valley flood and had lost my home. We visited about the disaster and during the interview we had to stop and watch television as President Clinton was visiting the flood scene. I was the emotional one during this interview, and Rena showed her compassionate side.

Rena's family highly valued education. Her mother was a voracious reader and instilled in her early the idea that she would do well in school and go to college. Rena stated, "I was a very successful in school, very successful all the way through. I always felt I was a worthy person because of the way my parents loved me and raised me." Both parents graduated from high school and of three siblings, two have college degrees.

Rena graduated from high school in 1960 and started college the following fall. She graduated from a small Catholic college in 1964 with a B.A. in education. During college she "stopped out" for a semester because of a serious auto accident, but made up the work and finished on schedule. From 1964 to 1976, Rena worked as a teacher with a major interest in Indian history. She took classes toward her master's degree, and finished her M.A. in teaching in 1976. Working as an Indian Education teacher with 60 credits beyond a master's degree, she decided to complete a Ph.D., which she earned in 1994.

### Nancy Buck Eye

Nancy Buck Eye is an enrolled member and grew up on a northern reservation. The interview took place at her lake home located right in the heart of 'Indian Country.' It was obvious Nancy was proud of her success as she showed me her home and the many wonderful cultural artifacts she had collected over the years. She pointed out that although she lived alone in the big home, she had several extra rooms often used by visiting family.



Family is a very important constant in her life as she still lives within ten miles of the rest of her family. We settled into the interview with very little distraction.

Nancy was very relaxed and eager to talk about her family and educational experience. Three of her four siblings have college degrees. Nancy's father and all of his siblings have at least high school degrees and her mother completed high school.

Education, especially higher education was greatly valued.

Nancy attended reservation schools with the exception of grades 1-4. She loved to read which made school fun and easy. Her high school years were traumatic as four of her class mates died violent deaths in motor vehicle accidents or suicide. These events changed Nancy's attitude about life, showing her that there was more to life than being a book worm. As a result, she began to participate in extra-curricular activities, joining clubs, going on field trips, and becoming a class leader. The combination of study and activities made school a fun place for her.

While excelling in school, Nancy had encouragement and support from many teachers. She laughed as she told me (sarcastically) that she had one counselor who was very influential because he told her that she should become a secretary because girls ought to go into something where they could be successful. As class valedictorian, it made her angry that the male student who graduated second in the class was encouraged to go to college and even to consider graduate school! Nancy graduated from high school in 1973. She graduated from a small northern college four years later with a B.A. in chemistry. Making it through with good grades was a struggle since she felt she was not as well



prepared as her male counterparts. However, with the help of mentors and a close circle of Indian students struggling like herself, she completed her degree.

During her graduation ceremony Nancy's father had a heart attack. He died six weeks later. The event was quite traumatic and caused her to "stop-out" for a year before she began medical school. She completed two years and stopped out again. Nancy stated:

*People won't take off a year from school, I mean (in) medical school, (it's) almost unheard of unless you're in a coma or something. I did. And, I needed that time because every time I took some time out I tended to really grow and mature as a person and came back stronger. But that's not allowable in many academic environments. It takes a lot of guts to say I need some time here, I need to make some decisions. But then whenever I came back I was even more strongly committed to what I was going to do in terms of academics.*

After her return to medical school, Nancy completed her MD in 1983 and spent the next three years in a family practice residency program. She passed her board examination and began her career as a medical doctor working in Indian communities.

#### Ginger Cottonwood

Ginger Cottonwood is an enrolled member of a northern plains tribe. The interview took place on a small, southern, metropolitan campus. The room was full of wonderful books and modern technological equipment. Ginger was very relaxed and at times very emotional as the interview progressed

Ginger grew up off the reservation but visited it often since family members lived there. Ginger's parents were strong believers in education because of their own lack of it.

Her mother graduated from high school and her father only completed the third grade.

They felt it was their responsibility for their children to become educated.

Ginger did very well in school claiming she “always got straight A’s except in math and science.” Ginger felt that attending Catholic school gave her very good training in terms of the learning process and discipline. Her parents were very strict yet loving. She remembers her mother reading to the family every single night. The family emphasis on higher education lead to Ginger’s brothers receiving a B.A. and J.D., and a sister receiving a Ph.D.

Ginger claimed to be a good student because of excellent teachers and a good self-concept. She also became aware at an early age that there were benefits and rewards for being a good student. Although she excelled, she was also aware on some level that the more she read and investigated, the more she began to realize all the inequities that existed.

Ginger stated:

*I began to be real angry about the things I didn't know, had never been taught. And that was quite hard. I remember beginning to hate history because everything that I was taught negated who I was, and I was very conscious of that. And, I was intelligent enough to know there was something wrong with what I was being taught because I wasn't being taught anything about who I was. It was very, very uncomfortable. I was so angry at what I was learning because I knew it wasn't right that I had no interest in going on to school even though I was doing well academically. I had figured out lots and lots of the inequities in terms of the*

*educational system, about admissions and inappropriate characterizations.*

*Disillusioned, didn't go back to school until I was 27. It was 1970.*

Ginger graduated from high school in 1959 and didn't begin her journey toward her BA degree until 1970. She graduated from a small northern university with a B.A. in secondary education. She claims she would not have made it through without mentors, American Indian support programs, a good work ethic, and a strong support group of other Indian kids like herself. She was involved in student government, politics, and Indian issues. Ginger completed her M.S. in counseling in 1977 and began work in student support services. She started work on her Ph.D. as a Bush Fellow and took ten years to complete it. She graduated with a Ph.D. in social, philosophical, and psychological foundations of education in 1989.

Many words can be used to describe these ten interviews. They were relatively informal but structured at the same time. The participants were often surprised at how much they remembered, often calling a first or second grade teacher by name and then telling me that they hadn't thought about a specific event in thirty or forty years. There were some very emotional moments when it was necessary to pause, use Kleenex, and begin again.

Chapter III provided a description of the participants and their individual background. Information was also provided about the interview setting and each participant's educational experience over as many years as it took to complete kindergarten through a terminal degree. Chapter IV will present the themes and discussion.



## CHAPTER IV

### THEMES AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore in-depth the educational experience among ten successful American Indians through the completion of their terminal advanced degrees. The main focus for this study involved identifying themes recurring in the interviews about the educational experience in order to aid educators in developing new approaches in designing curriculum and student support services for American Indian students.

This chapter identifies five themes and two common features that emerged from data collected through in-depth interviews with ten participants using inductive qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and observations. The data were then analyzed employing an inductive coding process (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The following five themes were identified:

***Theme One:*** The value of education was highly stressed by the participant, his/her family, and mentors all through the educational experience.

***Theme Two:*** A strong faculty member/ mentor and American Indian support system (often called a community) were available and very important to the participants as they progressed to the completion of their terminal degree.

***Theme Three:*** The participants had a positive self-image which contributed to a successful academic experience.

**Theme Four:** The participants describe themselves as self-disciplined and/or goal-oriented.

**Theme Five:** The participants engaged in extra-curricular activities during their schooling which enhanced their academic experience.

**Other Common Features:** First, all but one participant "stopped-out" at least one time during their educational experience. Second, the participants were products of public, private, or parochial education during their preparatory years.

#### Theme One and Supporting Evidence

**Theme One:** The value of education was highly stressed by the participant and his/her family, and mentors all through the educational experience.

All through the interviews the participants spoke about how the value of education was stressed by family members and educators. All but one of the participants' parents completed at least high school and more than half of the parents completed some college. Each participant had several family members with college degrees. In many cases education was seen as a way out of poverty and menial jobs. Parents stressed education as the way to get ahead in life.

Gene Lone Oak states:

*I remember my father used to always say to go to school and stay in school. He never gave any help with our homework but he used to always say that we should stay in school. He would tell us it would be easier on us to stay in school than to do what he was doing, mechanical stuff. My mother was similar with her educational encouragement. She used to always encourage us to do well, she would make us do*

*our homework and always was able to give us assistance until we got into the upper grades. Maybe education was something that was instilled in us by our parents and maybe seeing all my sisters achieve and do well added something. We seemed to have a pretty good life.*

Gene also remembers his teachers being fair and encouraging, especially his first grade teacher. He excelled when he was singled out and recognized. The teachers Gene mentioned most were the teachers who motivated him to do well. However, he said:

*I think my parents were motivating. I think that really helped me personally more so than most of the teachers or counselors I ever had. When I look at myself I think I succeeded because my father had really strict work ethics. He was really a hard worker. I remember he would get kinda upset if he asked us to do something and we didn't. I remember that was really pushed into us. They would go to work everyday and come home and I think it really influenced us. I think that they had expectations and expected the kids to honor that and so we had different chores that we had to do. That teaches you things.*

Regan Birch found the dominant women in his life the force which instilled in him the value of education. Having a grandmother with a high school education (unusual for her time) made a difference for him. Regan said, "I was always expected to go to college. That was just something I grew up with. You will go to college. That was the way you did it with the background of my mother and my grandmother saying to my father, 'he will graduate from high school and college.' "



Regan enjoyed school and had a wonderful attitude because he did well in classes. He never “stopped out” because he states, “I never saw an alternative to going to school. I was successful at it, and that always kept me going. I had good skills which, in part, is why I was successful.”

Rodney Pine remembers that doing well in school was necessary and expected. He states, “My folks pushed me through school. They got me into school at the age of 4, and for some reason or another, wanted me out of school, and to get on with my life at a very early age.” Because of the pressure to succeed and excel, Rodney thought about dropping out of school. He got up and left class one day and walked to his mother’s office and told her he didn’t want to go to school anymore. He remembers her response was not “no, you get your butt back to school right now or I’m gonna tell your dad.” Instead, she said:

*Well, let me put it to you this way, if you want to drop-out this is what’s going to happen. And she kept telling me that work, being a full-time manual laborer was not all that great. You need to work yourself up from the bottom and this is not all that creative a process. If you don’t have an education, you are gonna stay at the bottom. You’re gonna stay at the low-pay jobs and wait on tables. You’re gonna wash cars. You’re gonna push a broom. You’re gonna have a shovel in your hand. I remembered I didn’t necessarily like that shovel during the summer months. Then, just in that instant I remember something going off in my head. I can’t see myself doing this for the rest of my life. I have always been told that education was my destiny and I believe this today because good things have happened.*

Rodney fondly remembers his first grade teacher as the teacher who most influenced him in school. For some reason, as he states:

*She saw me as a special student who had special qualities and maybe some gifts, and she made me use it. And as a result of that, school came easy. Remember, I was only four years old in the first grade. She involved me in theater, she involved me in speech, she involved me in volunteer work. She was the foundation for the future of my scholastic pursuits. She laid the value of education on the line and along with the attitude of my parents, I was headed in the right direction.*

Don Aspen learned the value of education from his tribe. He told me "they were a pretty strong advocate for education. They had truant officers and they would go right out into your home and find you and drag you into school." He also remembers being influenced by the example set by his father, the first American Indian person to graduate from a South Dakota University with a Ph.D. in psychology. Don said, "He was a role model for academic success for me."

Darcy Willow's parents promoted education yet they never interfered. He remembers that they never set foot in the school, but they supported him at home. He always did his school work because of the structure at home. It was important to finish his chores and schoolwork.

Nancy Buck Eye remembers that her family valued education:

*Higher education was always encouraged in my family. My father came from a family of six, all born and raised on the reservation. All of them have higher education. Most have bachelor's degrees. Two have master's degrees in his family.*



*So education from that generation was encouraged and became an accepted part of what we would do in my generation. My mom used to say when she was a kid you had to reach sixteen and then you could quit. Well in our family it was a given, you finished college then you can quit. It was just a different expectation that came with the generation that I grew up in.*

Nancy claims that the best teachers she had were her parents and grandparents. In addition, a few mentors who encouraged her to hang in there when things got rough.

Linda Basswood vividly remembers getting a lot of attention from teachers and often becoming a teacher's pet. She told me that the teachers really liked her and that she thrived on the attention she got from them, listened to them, and believed in them. Linda said:

*My sixth grade teacher was very influential. She made me feel special, you know. She definitely made me feel that for whatever reason, what I was doing in school was valuable and that someday I could go to college and be successful.*

Linda lost her mother in the eighth grade and her older sister took over the responsibility of seeing that she finished her education. Linda states:

*I think probably the only reason I continued to stay in school was Jenny, my oldest sister, you know, she really stressed the need to go to school and get your education. And even though, at that point, I was really resisting anything that she told me, obviously something stuck there. She kept me going to school.*

Ginger Cottonwood's father who was born in the late 1800s only went through the third grade. Her mother graduated from the eighth grade. Ginger states, "Both my parents



were strong believers in education and it may have been because of their own lack of it that they thought it was necessary for their children to become educated.”

Rena Hemlock’s parents had strong feelings about the value of education. Rena’s parents kept the family away from the drinking that occurred in the community and she felt this was a major factor in her successful education. She also gives her mother credit for sending her in the direction of college at a young age. Rena states:

*My mother was a voracious reader and she instilled in me the idea that of course I would go to school and on to college. There was no question that I would go to school. I never questioned it once in my life. I was automatically expected to go on to college. My mother, in fact, in the dedication of my dissertation I tell her if it weren’t for her and her belief in the power of education, I would never have been there because she believed that education was the answer. And she believed when I was growing up that I would go to college and there was never a question that I would go to college. I never questioned it.*

Rena’s mother set a wonderful example for her daughter to follow. Her mom had perfect attendance all the way through school!

Elaine Chestnut comes from a well educated family in which of eight siblings, all but one have received college degrees. Elaine stated the following:

*My father was very, very into education, and he understood the value of education. He had some good role models, his uncles were doctors and his sister got a master’s in social work. His brothers and his sisters were very successful because of education.*

Elaine further credits teachers with being supportive and encouraging her to write as preparation for college.

### Theme Two and Supporting Evidence

***Theme Two: A strong faculty member/ mentor and American Indian support system (often called a community) were available and very important to the participants as they progressed to the completion of their terminal degree.***

Gene Lone Oak reported that his parents were the strongest mentors he had. He stated, "I think that they really helped me personally. Probably more so than most of the teachers or guidance counselors I ever had. I don't remember having better mentors." However, Gene gives much credit of his early success to a strong support system of seven other American Indian students. Gene said:

*BIA covered my tuition, books, board and room, and after that sometimes I had like ten or fifteen dollars left over so I had to work and that was pretty much the same for all the Indian kids, some had a little better package than I did, but not much. So once you got there you stayed there and stuck together. You didn't have the money to go to movies. I can remember when I got paid, every two weeks, all eight of us Indian kids would go to the café and I would treat them.*

After graduating with a B.S. in education, Gene was recruited by a mentor to work in a teacher training program. This same mentor encouraged him to begin taking classes toward a master's degree and then later to begin his doctoral program. Gene remembers:

*I heard from instructors and whatever their thoughts were, gee, you should go on; you have ability to do well in graduate school. You should do it. I remember all*



*these words were a problem for me because I didn't feel it yet and I think it was their encouragement or whatever that made me think, 'Oh hell, I'm gonna try this. It's something they keep saying I can do.' I would say that my mentor Dr. Hayman was the most instrumental person in giving me the feeling that I could do it. He encouraged me the most.*

Gene made it clear that even his children encouraged him even though they were young.

Regan Birch found his support system in the faculty mentors he had.

He remembers that,

*As is the case today, you get a student like myself in class and he seems really interested in your field and who goes to the same things you do, like I would go to concerts. I had never been to concerts, but sounded good. And I like 'em, I found out in college. Or you would go to book readings or you would go to what they call brown bag lunches now. Or you would go ask a faculty member, 'What can I read?' And they just loved that. And they sort of adopted me. And so there was a support group. There was a lot of support for me to achieve.*

Regan found support in a group of graduate students like himself; students who were serious and dedicated and who were involved in the same kinds of interests. Regan said: "I just kept falling into these people to help me and had enough sense, most of the time, to listen to what they were saying."

Rodney Pine credits his mentor with his success. Rodney said,

*This guy felt that I could finish the program in two years. And believe me, he made me work. He was hard on me. But he enlightened me. He enlightened me. When*



*he called me to come back to school he said 'How would you like to earn a doctor's degree?' I sat back in my chair and said, 'me, a doctor.' 'Nah,' I said. 'I've got a master's. I'm a veteran. You know, I've got the experience. I'm in man, you know. I don't need this anymore. I don't need education any more. So I said why me?' And that's all I needed, you know, I'd ask these awful crazy questions. 'Why me?' I told him. And he said 'I believe you are ready to earn a doctor's degree,' and I believed that he was right when he felt that I was ready.*

Again, Rodney said that he can't stress enough how much he was blessed with supportive parents:

*I've been blessed. I truly believe that I have the world's most perfect parents because they've done everything for me. They've supported me in everything that I've done. They love one another, which is probably more important than them loving me, because I was able to see that. Kids need to feel involvement by parents, by relatives, by friends, by teachers, by administrators, they need a true community. I can't over-emphasize the importance of community and once they have that they can do anything.*

Don Aspen found his support in a mentor he met right before entering college. The man was a clinical psychologist, a friend of his father, and the director of the clinical training program at the college where Don was about to enroll.

*He just seemed like a very nice guy, you know, and I thought, 'well, he seems pretty neat.' I'll see if I can take a couple of classes from him. And I got to know him and he took me under his wing and I asked him about psychology. He made it clear to*

*me that, 'man, it's a good field to be in because there's a lot of different things you can do,' and on and on and on. And really, from that point on, I got it in my head that that's what I wanted to do and never looked back. And so I knew that if I wanted to have a chance that I had to perform at the highest level. My mentor wouldn't let me quit. There was one thing that my mentor helped crystalize for me, you could get into academia where you could have dozens, even hundreds, of people sitting in front of you, Indian and non-Indian, and you could have an impact on them. Then I knew ya, that's a place where I really could have a significant impact, and so once that was clear to me, that that would be something that would be really important, then there was nothing that was going to stop me.*

Don also found support from his wife, an honor student who taught him how to study. He said "she was really the one that taught me how to be a college student!" In terms of personal support from his family during college there was very little except for the occasional "what you are doing is great." The support in college as an undergraduate came from the Indian community:

*The personal support that I got the most I think was from other Indian faculty and other Indian students in the Indian club. We called it the extended family. We had some really good relationships and good friends. It was just really, really helpful. And so we were all on softball teams and played volleyball and had picnics and our families were always together and things like that. So I think it was the university Indian community that was a good thing. It just felt like home to me.*

Darcy Willow also found an Indian community at college. He told me:

*When I went to college, my sister and her husband came there too. There were some other Turtle Mountain people that came down there also. So we had a little community at that point, fifteen, twenty of us. Some of them had their family, some of them not. So we had a support system. There wasn't anything at that college for Indians; nothing, not a thing, so we had our own little support system.*

Darcy had a mentor in college who took an interest in him and knew him well. The mentor really helped and encouraged him to be successful.

Nancy Buck Eye graduated from high school and went right on to college, immediately finding a community.

*We had about six Indian kids there, and we formed a tight group, and I think you'll find that with any college system, that the Indian kids will band together. Didn't matter where we were from. Again, there were about six of us and school was okay, as long as we had each other to bounce things off and set ourselves apart. I stuck with Indian kids the whole way through but I was able to broaden my horizons by having some non-Indian friends too.*

Nancy also remembers mentors who worked with her and encouraged her to be strong, stay in there, and tough it out. But to Nancy, the most important factor when coming into an academic environment is to find the other Indian people or a student is not going to stay in school.

Linda Basswood experienced the importance of an Indian community in the senior year of high school when she attended a boarding school far from home. She remembers



the school as lacking “color,” which they fixed by bringing in Indian kids from all over the country:

*There was like four Navajo kids there, a couple Hopi, one gal from Rosebud. So we all kinda hung out together, you know, the Indian kids did. And we had one counselor who was assigned to the Indian kids, and he helped a lot cause he'd bring us to his home and, you know, just let us hang out there. And that was good. After I started college I ended up again hanging out with the Indian community and had a great support system out there cause there was quite a few Indian families that actually lived in the family housing so we hung out together. We took care of each other's kids and cried on each other's shoulders and did picnics and did Pow Wows together.*

Linda knew mentors were important to her success because as she remembers it, the attention made her feel special. She stated, “They made me feel like I was worth something and to have somebody within the system telling you that you deserve something better and you can have something better, you know, is a real important thing.”

Ginger Cottonwood attended a Catholic school. She remembers the nuns encouraging her to go to college because they thought she would do well. However, she credits her success to a college mentor:

*The only reason I am convinced that I made it through college, because I don't think I could have, was Frank. He was a person, an American Indian person, Ojibwa guy from White Earth I think it was. He was getting his MA in counseling, and part of what he did in this whole process was to organize an American Indian*

*support program. There were ten of us I guess, and I remember we were this whole group and we were so tight. I mean, we took our classes together, we had coffee together, partied together. We were just really close. I am convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt, that's why we made it through. If we had been in an institution where there had been like one or two of us, I think it would have been almost impossible to survive. The four years that I had in college were some of the best times in my life because of these people that I was with, that I shared with, that I was around all the time. It was absolutely amazing. I could never have made it without them.*

Ginger was very emotional as she remembered what being part of this group meant to her.

She told me after an dramatic pause,

*I absolutely believe that. I didn't feel isolated because I had a group. My group was the rest of the Indian students. It didn't make any difference to me if anybody else at the university liked me or not. That was my community and so having that community, I was doing well in school.*

Rena Hemlock didn't get through college without being part of a group. She remembers really needing this group because of coming from a very close and extended family.

*My friends, now when I look back on it, they were dynamite people. And those were the days of folk music and there was singing and learning all the songs. And I learned to play the guitar. And we had a little group that would actually go out and*

*play in churches and so forth, sing all those songs. Joan Baez was our favorite. We were the popular poor kids.*

Rena's memories of her college life while taking classes towards her doctorate involved a family support system. She recalls:

*As I was attending the university I had some great mentors and some great friends. But the thing that did it for me was my family support system. As a mom and a grandma, you cannot do that paper, you cannot do that research, unless you've got a support system. My daughter and my sister-in-law just took over the kitchen and took care of the family while I would be upstairs in the computer room.*

Rena told me she feels strongly that "students can't make it if they are not surrounded by family and by their friends."

Elaine Chestnut made it through school without a support system but admits it was very difficult. She found herself asking for help only when she was in trouble. Once when Elaine was on academic probation she went to her professor:

*I asked him, would you help me? Would you tutor me because I'm afraid I'm gonna fail out? And he said 'yes I will.' So he took me and we would meet every week. I would write him (legal) terms, and he would grade them, and I'd come back and I'd read with him, and by the end of that semester, I went from a D average to a B minus average just, you know, by getting the mentoring and obedience. Each time I got into trouble I would have to humble myself and go to somebody and ask for help.*



The participants all had some kind of support which included family, teachers, mentors, and support groups typically consisting of other Indian people.

### Theme Three and Supporting Evidence

**Theme Three: The participants had a positive self-image which contributed to a successful academic experience.** Having a good educational experience beginning in the early grades seemed to be a common theme among all the participants. But, to me the most interesting and intriguing fact was that these people *all* had a positive attitude about themselves and how well they did in school. They were very self confident.

Gene Lone Oak told me that he liked school more than anything else. He remembered doing well on a math assignment. He really like being singled out and recognized. In college he was able to do the work and do it well. Gene told me, "I was kinda enthused and eager about college. I knew that I had the skills to study and do well."

Regan Birch remembers school as a good experience, "I was a good student, not great, but good. And I enjoyed school." Regan also remembers "I liked being singled out when I did well. When I got to college I knew I had the skills necessary to perform in college. I had good skills which is why I was successful." Regan went on to use terms such as "wonderful" and "magnificent" experience, to describe how he felt about academia.

Rodney Pine had a very active grade school life and expressed his delight with his school experience as follows:

*I really enjoyed my eight years of Catholic school. I really did. Every teacher inspired me. Every nun that I had inspired me because of their focus, although spiritual and religious, their focus was one, learning to be responsible and having*

*goals in your life. I was a straight A student. I was the kid who always stood up for the weaklings. I was always the caretaker.*

Later in college, he got his degrees which made him feel that "I am something special. I'm gonna save the world."

Don Aspen said for him "school was a breeze, I did fairly well in high school. I was actually even an honor student part of the time." Don was a popular three letter athlete who was good at it. He described himself in positive terms while relating his educational experience.

*I was lucky enough, to be gifted enough, to be good enough, to rate a full scholarship. I was Phi Beta Kappa, the only one in my graduate program all four years that I was there. I was the only one that had an APA Fellowship.*

Don had a lot of reasons to believe he would be successful.

Darcy Willow described himself as a good student. He was never an A student, but he always did his work. Darcy said, "I did well in school, did well with my master's and with everything going well, I applied for and was good enough to get the Bush Fellowship." Darcy had a very good self-image.

Nancy Buckeye described herself as a real bookworm. She got straight A's in school and took a lot of teasing for it. Nancy knew she would be a medical doctor as early as the fourth grade. After learning that there was more to school than book learning, she became a popular student joining clubs, becoming a student council member, president of the library club and a cheerleader. She enjoyed being in leadership positions. Confident in herself, she took challenging classes always knowing she would finish college.



Linda Basswood knew she was a worthy person early on in school. She stated:

*I did well in school and I ended up being the teacher's pet a lot of times. You know, they all really liked me, and of course, I thrived on the attention I got from them. My sixth grade teacher was very influential on me. She made me feel special. For whatever reason, teachers responded to me and made me feel like I could do something and I could go to college and I was worth something. I believed them.*

Linda told me she was a good student, always got good grades, and paid attention to the teachers. After losing her mother at an early age, Linda realized that what she did with her life was really up to her and she described herself as self-motivated.

Ginger Cottonwood is another participant who was confident in her abilities as a student.

*I did very well in school. I always got straight A's except in math and science, but I did real well in all the other stuff. I was part of a clique of students like myself, poor, but who tended to do better in school. I had lots of encouragement from the nuns because I was bright, and they saw the potential in me.*

Ginger mentions being a good student and being bright at least seven times during the interview, indicating to me that she was a very confident student.

Rena Hemlock, a very successful college professor, confided to me that she was a very successful and popular student.

*I was very successful in school, very successful all the way through and, um, didn't feel discriminated against at all. I had a lot of good friends and was very successful*



*perhaps because of personality and ability. I always felt that I was a worthy person because of the way my parents loved me and raised me.*

Rena spoke about many experiences during her school days that added to her self confidence.

*Once I was the star of the little kindergarten presentation and this helped to build success. My mother taught us to sing and dance, and I think that was part of the self-confidence that began at a very young age. I know successful experiences aided me because I had success all the way through.*

Rena dated a popular football star, got straight A's and said of her high school experience, "I just had a marvelous time."

Elaine Chestnut expressed that she had a positive school experience because of positive reinforcement contributing to her self confidence. She remembers being a good student and getting lots of praise and reinforcement from her parents for getting good grades. Elaine really liked school.

*I really liked going to school I really identified a lot with school. You know, it was my way of saying this is who I am. I can learn and I can express myself. It was a good experience. The teachers favored me because I was bright and they were supportive of everything I did as far as writing and doing projects.*

#### Theme Four and Supporting Evidence

**Theme Four: The participants describe themselves as self-disciplined and/or goal-oriented.**

Many of the participants spoke about the drive to succeed. They knew they could be successful and went about it in different ways. Five of these students come from a military background either involving themselves or their parents. They give the military credit for instilling the value of discipline. Many of them came from Catholic school backgrounds which they all claim were very strict in enforcing discipline and teaching self-discipline. And several of them spoke often about being goal-oriented after being influenced by a favorite teacher.

Gene Lone Oak knew that he wanted to be successful so he worked hard. In college he was able to do the work and was motivated to study. He disciplined himself to do his assignments so that they would all be done at once. Gene said, "When I look at myself I think I succeeded because of my father's really strict work ethic."

Regan Birch was a self described "army brat." He remembers attending six grade schools and two high schools, a varied background, that he found to be stimulating. He was placed on a "college track" and worked hard. Because he was a disciplined individual, he finished his M.A. in two years and his Ph.D. in three years.

Rodney Pine's parents were both graduates of Indian boarding schools and both enlisted in the military. The work ethic instilled in them from their backgrounds was passed on to their children. Rodney said:

*My parents thought boarding school was great for them because it taught them discipline. It taught them responsibility. It taught them commitment. As a result, my brother and I were sent to the same schools. We also learned discipline. What I remember about that Catholic school was very, very strict, strict regimen. These*

*teachers taught us to be responsible and have goals in our life. They created the goals for us and got us to think in terms of being goal-oriented without us realizing this.*

After having a good academic experience in high school, Rodney graduated and enlisted in the Army.

Rodney enjoyed his training in the military where he made many friends .

*The military gave me a fine tune to discipline that I was looking for, the self-discipline that I was looking for, and the training is what did it. Remember the difference between education and training. The military, I've always come to believe, trained us well. But one of the reasons that I got out of the army is because I felt the literacy level of my fellow troops was so low that if we ever went to war, they were gonna get me killed!*

Rodney told me that once he did something that he had to do it to the best of his ability and try to achieve the highest possible level. He said, "If there was an A to be achieved, I knew I had to have that A."

Rodney remembered his first grade teacher instilling in him the value of making goals. This value stuck with him so that he set goals all his life. One of his goals was to become a school superintendent, a goal that he accomplished as the youngest superintendent ever in his state.

Don Aspen is another participant with a military background. He found that when he entered the military school programs, he did not have any idea how to study. Don said:



*In the Navy I really learned a lot of discipline. In the fact that you know when it's time to study, it's time to study to the exclusion of everything else. I also learned that I wanted to go on to college and these study skills would benefit me. When I started college my days were structured. My day consisted of going to classes, then to track practice, then supper, then studying and homework for the rest of the evening. I thrived on this schedule and that's another way I think the military really helped me. I was very persistent with my school work. If it took me eight hours to finish my algebra assignment, then that's what it took. I was never going to quit. I was taught that there is a certain amount of interdependence on other people but self-reliance is very, very important. I was able to get good grades in college with my self-discipline, persistence, and sticking with it.*

Darcy Willow remembers discipline as a part of his life from a very early age. He came from a very structured home environment. His parents required him to do chores and work together with the rest of the family. Darcy was drafted into the military where he spent several years in Europe.

*I went to non-commissioned officer's school and finished third in my class. I had a good military experience and it really helped me in life cause it helped with discipline. My family had a lot to do with it too. The discipline helped me to stay on track with my studies.*

Nancy Buck Eye practiced self-discipline from an early age in school. It paid off in college when she was required to take courses for which she was academically unprepared.

*School was hard and easy. There were certain classes that I found extremely easy. Certain classes that were so challenging that I spent hours determined to get through. I could have graduated top honors all the way, but I chose to go into some classes that were particularly challenging, and, even though I did okay because I was self-disciplined, it was not easy.*

Nancy set the goal of becoming a doctor in the fourth grade and stuck to that goal even though the path was difficult and challenging.

Linda Basswood remembers a few rocky years as an adolescent after her mother died. She indicated that she became wild, bouncing around in foster homes and living with her sister.

*I don't know exactly why I changed, but I changed at that point because I became like an independent person. I realized that it was really up to me what I did with my life. I started paying more attention to school work. I was more disciplined. It was like I was self motivated. When I was ready to start college I filled out all the forms on my own. I didn't depend on anyone else.*

Linda's goal was to succeed in law school. She made choices which were not always easy to accomplish her goal. She moved herself and her son away from home and family. Although she was homesick, she stuck it out with her determination and self-discipline.

Ginger Cottonwood came from a Catholic school background where there was a very strict environment with reinforced discipline. Her parents were very strict. Her mother was instrumental in getting Ginger to set a goal of becoming well educated. Ginger stated her mother used to say, "You gotta stay in school, you gotta stay in school. If you



stay in school you're gonna have choices. If you stay in school, you won't be poor all your life." Ginger was driven to succeed out of a need to please her parents. The only time her self-discipline failed her was when she was lacking the support of an Indian community.

Rena Hemlock was a disciplined student. She told me, "I was the overachiever, that kind of self-driven first born child." Rena surrounded herself with a little clique of friends who were very competitive. They were competing for grades in a friendly way. She kept these friends, who were skilled and talented people, close in order to keep her skills sharp. Rena worked hard in high school because she had college as a goal. She explained,

*There was never a question that I wouldn't go to college. I never questioned it and then I chose the college with the highest academic standards. School was very difficult for me because I didn't have the background. It took a lot of effort and I was very disciplined about it.*

Rena attacked each phase of her education with the same discipline. Once she started something, she completed it.

Elaine Chestnut learned her self-discipline from a very strict father who was a very rigid disciplinarian. Her father was a retired military man and stressed the value of education. So Elaine was very self-disciplined. She stated:

*I loved school, and, believe me, the mission (Catholic) school system was so strict. I strived to be perfect and one of the most traumatic times was when I ruined my perfect attendance record in the fifth grade. I had measles and was trying to hide 'em with a sweater. One of the kids saw and told on me and they came and towed*



*me away. I worked hard to be a good student and I absorbed some of the disciplinary techniques father used.*

That very same self-discipline fell apart at college when her support system was not there.

She left school but came back after setting new goals for herself. Elaine said:

*Part of the mistake I made then was that I didn't set goals for myself. I now tell students to set goals for themselves. That's really important. That was the mistake I made. I didn't know what my goal was. I didn't know it til 1981, til I kept dropping out, going back and dropping out again. I worked many different types of work. I was a maid, a factory worker, secretary, and community worker. I had no mentor and no encouragement. I graduated and then started law school. This was a very different setting for me. I had a tough time, but I just committed myself to doing what I needed to do to get the passing grade. The most important thing I did was to ask for help and my tutor became my mentor. I went from a D average to a B average and it came from the mentoring and discipline.*

The participants speak consistently about the structure and discipline at school. This discipline influenced them to be self-disciplined goal setters throughout their academic careers which helped them to be successful.

#### Theme Five and Supporting Evidence

**Theme Five: The participants engaged in extra-curricular activities during their schooling which enhanced their academic experience.**

The participants were all outgoing and very friendly during the interviews. Their occupations call for them to interact with people on a daily basis. Several participants

reported that their ability to interact with others was influenced by their involvement in extra-curricular activities at some point during their academic careers.

Gene Lone Oak liked school. He remembers that making the honor roll made him feel good. However, the thing that made him feel really good was his participation in sports. He told me:

*Some of the other things that I remember is that I think I felt a whole lot better doing things like sports. I felt I was good enough to go on to play college ball, but even back then I didn't know what college was all about. I can remember back when I was a freshmen and you take all those interest tests and some of those white kids knew they wanted to be engineers and I didn't know what an engineer was. But being good enough to play college sports made me think that, 'gee, maybe I should find out what college was all about.'*

In Gene's case, thinking about playing college ball prompted him to think about college.

Regan Birch also really liked school. He was aware at a young age that he was on a college track. Regan remembers:

*I participated in sports in high school and that will always be a really good experience if you make the team, and I did, so that was fine. And of course, where I came from there are only two sports, there's football and there's spring practice. In college, I wound up in a fraternity. It was a social fraternity and because of that I started getting involved in some of the issues that were so prevalent in the sixties.*

Regan's participation in sports and the fraternity gave him the opportunity to make many friends which further developed his support system.



Rodney Pine's father used to tell him stories about how playing sports was his way out of a poor life. So as a result, Rodney was actively involved in every sport that was offered. He excelled in every sport he that tried, stating that:

*I started sports in grade school. And I was very, very active with that. Very active because I saw it as my dad's ticket out. So I came to believe that it was my ticket out, and that, I, if I could be successful in basketball, I could be successful in anything that I wanted to do. And I, truly, still hold that very dear to my heart today, that if you can be successful in your extracurricular activities that will help you be successful in life. In high school I played five sports and was a five sport letter winner. I stayed active cause the more active I stayed the less apt I was to get into trouble after school because I was just exhausted. I was raised with sports and I believe it taught me the value of participation. Sports is a help. It helps you, but it's not supposed to dictate your life.*

Rodney felt that participation in sports helped him to make many friends and afforded him many valuable opportunities such as teaching classes at the International Olympic Academy.

Don Aspen was also very athletic, participating in many sports. Don was very proud as he told me:

*I did everything, I was a three letter athlete in football, basketball, and track. I was all-state in all three of them. I did choir. I was in the school plays. It was a small school and I was active in everything that was going on. In college I participated in the Indian club which led me to some really good relationships and good friends. It*



*was just really helpful and it involved me in sports again. We played softball and volleyball as a group. However, being on the track team and having practice every night didn't leave me time to participate in clubs, which often meet in the evening.*

Don found that participating in sports helped him to make many friends and lasting relationships.

Darcy Willow came from a family which moved around a lot. His family was relocated from the reservation to the west coast and they moved to find work. Moving made it difficult for Darcy to make friends and become really acquainted with anybody. He worked after school every day which kept him from getting involved in sports or other activities. Darcy began participating in extra-curricular activities in college. He joined a group of students who were actively involved in campus activities. They started an Indian Studies program by lobbying the legislature for appropriated money. Darcy's membership in the group motivated him to develop himself more broadly. He began participating in other activities such as forming the Indian club. Once again, participation in a group helped him stay in school and become a successful student.

Nancy Buckeye stayed in school because it was fun. She started joining clubs, going on field trips, becoming president of the library club, participating on the student council, and cheerleading. For Nancy the combination made school a fun place to be. In college Nancy said,

*I was real involved with Indian activities. The Indian Club was probably the biggest social or political club that I joined. I didn't have much free time, I was studying so much, but I did do some outside activities. Bowling was one of them. I mean as*

*simple as it sounds, it was there I met people in the community, and it was another ground and reality to me. Because I know academic studying is not a reality-based lifestyle for the rest of your life. It's for that period of time that you're there.*

The outside activities gave Nancy the opportunity to interact with the real world.

Linda Basswood discovered participation in extra-curricular activities after high school. She told me "I'd always kinda wished I'd had some of those influences in my early life." She did however, participate in the Upward Bound program, a program designed to get kids to think about college and to understand that they really could go to college and succeed.

In college Linda became involved as she relates:

*I joined the Council of Indian students. I made friends and we pretty much ran it for a couple of years. We worked together and put on the Pow Wow. I was engaged with the university about Indian issues and sat on different boards and committees and this was a really important piece in my experience at college. I started playing organized volleyball and softball and really loved that. I loved the team aspect and I always wished that I had had some of that when I was growing up. Part of the reason I never did is because we were so poor. A lot of that stuff cost money that we just didn't have. But I know it's important and while raising my son, I tried to at least give him some of that exposure and experience.*

In law school Linda remained active helping to put on Indian law conferences. She found that participating in this activity provided her with the opportunity to meet brilliant lawyers who helped her find direction in her future career as an attorney.



Ginger Cottonwood was not active in sports or other activities in high school. In college Ginger blossomed. She told me:

*In college I had some of the best times in of my life because of the people that I shared it with. We had a very strong student democratic bunch on campus. I was part of Students for Democratic Action. I was a delegate to the National Democratic Convention in 1972, and I was a dorm director for the Upward Bound program.*

Ginger was sure that her activities in college were a basis for forming strong bonds with the support group that helped her make it through college.

Rena Hemlock was very successful in school and credits that success to enjoying all the extra-curricular activities she participated in. She told me:

*I was active in all the activities that you could possibly be active in. I was in dance and in a dance show, I was in the plays. I danced in the high school gym for a whole crowd of people. Later I was in gymnastics and cheerleading. I was accepted as part of the group. I was very accepted as a friend. I just had a marvelous time.*

Rena felt that having these social successes were an important part of her success in life. She said, "students need success so they know they can do anything and succeed at it."

Elaine Chestnut didn't participate in extra-curricular activities while she was in school living on the reservation. She was considered an outsider because her mother was not a tribal member. As a result, Elaine was always afraid of getting picked on so she withdrew. In tenth grade she received a scholarship to attend a boarding school where



she was introduced to sports. She didn't really come out of her shyness until she joined the Drama Club and was in plays. Elaine said, "It helped me a little bit to overcome some of my shyness. It helped me have the confidence to approach whoever I needed to approach. I found out I could do it. So that was a good experience." Elaine found that participating in extra-curricular activities made her more outgoing.

The participants appear to agree on the fact that joining extra-curricular activities made them confident, successful, social human beings. Engaging in extra-curricular activities actually helped some of the participants overcome shyness and self-doubt.

#### Other Common Features and Supporting Evidence

***Other Common Features:*** First, all but one participant "stopped-out" at least one time during their educational experience. Second, the participants were products of public, private, or parochial education during their preparatory years.

All but one participant revealed during the interview that they had "stopped-out" at least once during their academic experience. There was not any discussion about how this fact impacted them. It was stated as a matter of fact and related only incidently. Although it appears to be a common feature there was not enough discussion to identify this as a theme using the qualitative analysis process of codes leading to categories which leads to the identification of the theme.

Jean Lone Oak worked in a position in education for three years before beginning work on a master's degree. Darcy willow stopped out for several years before being awarded a Bush scholarship and returning to finish his Ph.D. Rodney Pine earned his B.S. and spent the next four years in the military before returning to school to complete a

master's degree. Don Aspen also entered the military after high school and served four years before beginning college.

Elaine Chestnut "stopped-out" several times to work. Linda Basswood worked for at least a year after graduating from high school and then she started college. Rena Hemlock "stopped-out" during college because of a serious auto accident. Nancy Buck Eye "stopped-out" because of a family crisis. Ginger Cottonwood received her M.S. and worked before starting her doctoral program.

Although the participants "stopped-out" during the pursuit of their terminal degree they returned to finish what they started. The impact of "stopping-out" is identified as a topic for further research in the recommendations in the final chapter.

The second common feature the participants shared was that they were products of public, private, or parochial education during their preparatory years. If the participants attended a reservation school it was for a very short time. Gene Lone Oak graduated from public school. Regan Birch attended public school. Rodney Pine attended a parochial grade school on the reservation. Don Aspen graduated from a public high school. Darcy attended and graduated from a public high school.

Nancy Buck Eye attended public school until she moved to the reservation public school in the fifth grade. Linda Basswood attended public school and graduated from a private school in the east. Ginger Cottonwood attended parochial school for all grades and graduated from parochial school. Rena Hemlock attended and graduated from a public school. Elaine Chestnut attended public grade school and graduated from a parochial high school.



During the interviews none of the participants elaborated on the impact attending public, private, or parochial schools had on their educational experience. Several of them mentioned incidently that parochial school was strict. Although it appears to be a common feature there was not enough discussion to identify this as a theme using the qualitative analysis process of codes leading to categories which leads to the identification of the theme. Although the participants shared the common feature of having a public, private, or parochial school education, the impact of not having solely attended reservation BIA or tribal schools is identified as a topic for further research in the recommendations in the final chapter.

In summary, the participants stressed how important it was to be taught the importance of education by family members, teachers or mentors. Parents set solid examples by enforcing the value of finishing homework and staying in school. A support system consisting of family, faculty members, teachers, mentors, and an Indian community on campus was important to the success of the participants. The participants also indicated by their statements that they had a positive self-image which contributed to their success. Having the ability to be self-disciplined and goal-oriented increased the participants chances of successfully completing high school and college. Finally, the participants stressed that being involved in extra-curricular activities in high school and college made them more out-going, self-confident, and more likely to stay in school. Chapter IV will provide a discussion of the literature in reference to the themes.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION OF THE LITERATURE IN REFERENCE TO THE THEMES

This chapter provides a discussion of the literature that relates to each of the five themes and the two common features that emerged from data collected through the in-depth interviews and the data analysis. Although I was able to find literature that relates to each theme, I have been selective in terms of what aspects of the related literature apply to the themes.

**Theme one:** *The value of education was highly stressed by the participant, his/her family and mentors all through the educational experience.* The exact wording associated with this theme was not present in the literature. There were, however, many citations referring to the importance of parental involvement in the educational process.

We know that both parent attitudes toward schools and that school attitudes of respect for students' languages and cultures are related to students' academic achievement (Dick, Estell & McCarty, 1994). Hardeman (1985) indicated that families play a crucial role in promoting values and attitudes such as a sense of purpose of education. Ironically, Robinson-Zanartu (1996) writes that even after legislation requiring parental involvement, most schools just give lip service to this requirement.

There is also a body of literature which indicates the importance of improving parental involvement in the education of their children. Latham (1989) writes that parental participation in the education of their children might be as low as four percent or less. The

attitude of parents tends to be passive: "The school knows best. I really have nothing to offer" (p.8). According to all ten participants in this study, their experiences were to the contrary. All ten participants felt that their parents were actively involved in some way. Falk and Aitken (1984) conducted interviews with 125 American Indian college students and determined that active support of the family members was one of the five most important factors promoting retention of American Indian college students. The results of Falk and Aitken's study indicated the following:

The support of family and the Indian community is important to Indian students, and efforts to maintain and expand this type of support may help increase retention among Indian students. Results indicate that the support of their families is a key factor in helping students to remain in school and that there is a relationship between parent's educational background and attitudes on the one hand and years of school completed on the other. Colleges and universities must reach out to Indian families and communities, educate them on their importance to students, and encourage their support for friends and relatives who are currently students (p.25).

Among students interviewed in Falk and Aitken's study, 47% indicated parental support promoted college attendance and completion.

In American society, as a whole, family socioeconomic status and parental educational level predict academic success (Sewell & Shah, 1967). American Indians are amongst the poorest segments in society and their educational attainment is very low. In light of this, family income and parents' educational attainment have been identified as poor predictors of college achievement by American Indians (Rindone, 1988). McCloskey



(1998) indicates that there is acceptance of the importance of college education as demonstrated by an increase in scholarships to Navajo students from 25 in 1953 to 3,253 in 1996. The parents of these Navajo students were much better educated than were the parents.'

Clark (1994) surveyed 165 Native American participants who either graduated or dropped out of school during 1989-91. During the interviews, the themes of poverty, self-esteem, and teacher attitudes repeatedly surfaced. Graduates frequently reported that family expectations (particularly those of the mother and grandmother) kept them in school. Seventy-three percent of those surveyed indicated "mother expected me to graduate" and 36.4% indicated Grandmother expected me to graduate. These students also indicated that 44.2% of "parents cared about my grades" (p.84).

Clark also identifies other research where parents are recognized as the strongest influence on a student's school work. According to Clark:

One study of Cree families reported that educational success for children was important, but that the Cree culture and heritage was equally important. Others reported that Indian parents internalized feelings of inferiority that affected their children's academic performance. On the other hand, others found little difference between parental behavior and student attitudes about education in Indian students (p39).

The participants in this dissertation study had parents who participated in many ways. The most often mentioned was helping with homework. Regardless of socioeconomic status or



years of education completed, these parents showed their children that they valued education by participating in the child's academic experience.

In a study by Minner and Prater (1992), students indicated reasons demonstrating that family had a negative impact on school attendance:

- My parents never really wanted me to attend college. They were afraid that I would not come back home. They were afraid that I would get a degree and move to Phoenix or somewhere where I could get a good job.
- My mother is very old and needs a lot of care. She has to go to the hospital every other week. There was no one to help her. That was hard for her and hard for me.
- My father told me that it was wrong for me to not be around home. He said that it was selfish. I told him that I could get a good job if I got my degree, but he said that that was foolish talk. He wanted me home. I think he was lonely.
- I think my family had something to do with my decision. I tried to get home as often as I could, but it was hard. When I was home, I couldn't study much. My parents and grandparents wanted me to help them and I didn't have time for studying. When I tried to do my studies I was interrupted and I was told to put my books and things away (pp. 53-54).

In a 1988-91 program developed between Hopi Tribe and Navajo Nation schools, colleges and universities in Arizona provided services to approximately 9,635 students to promote academic success. Gilbert (1996) reported that this successful program, which lasted three years addressed the following:

The program addressed the issues of the consequences of students dropping out of school, and how it effected their attitude towards school and in return, it allowed parents to become involved in their children's education. This program firmly believes that the root of students academic success in school is not solely based upon what the school can provide for the student, but instead, what parents of these children can provide for their children. (p.61).

Clearly the value of having parents involved is being expressed all across Indian country.

Deborah Dyson (1983) prepared a fact sheet addressing parents' roles and responsibilities in Indian education. Written for the benefit of Indian parents, the fact sheet offered basic suggestions for building good parent-school relationships to help children succeed in school. Dyson indicated that there are many things that parents can teach children before they enter school because the parents are the first teachers.

Investigators found that it was of supreme importance to include parents in the area schools' education programs (Washington State Johnson O'Malley Indian Education 1983-84 Annual Report). In order to provide closer contact between parents and the school, parents were asked to serve on committees which reviewed the proposal goals, objectives, and budget in their child's school. Parents were encouraged to meet with teachers and to attend parenting workshops.

Wells (1997) reported that a survey was conducted to ascertain what factors contribute to academic success or failure. Family problems were considered to be a major barrier to achievement.

Tierney (1992) reported that Indian students speak of how the world of higher education appears to them, reflecting influences of family, culture, gender, and class on student experience. Students felt strongly about the importance of parental involvement. One student stated, "Parents need to be involved. If they're there, then the parents will help. They need to be included" (p.100).

Finally, Gilbert (1996) identified a drop-out prevention program called Parent and Student Success (PASS). The program had many components designed to enlist parental support in teaching motivation, communication skills, vocational opportunities, and most importantly, to encourage their children to stay in school. This program was evaluated and found to be highly successful.

**Theme two: *A strong faculty member/mentor and Native American support system (often called a community) were available and very important to the participants as they progressed to the completion of their terminal degree.*** The literature is full of remarks about how disadvantaged Native American Students are. Tierney (1992) states that at one university:

All Native American students who enter the university are placed in what one person called the "high risk category." Native American students face so many obstacles—families, the schools they come from, cultural difference — that we put all of them into a high risk category. We try to monitor them more closely than others (p.96). The general consensus is that only strong relationships with a counseling and advisement center at the institution can uncover and address the personal and family circumstances confronting the Native American student.



The participants in this study all reported the necessity for a strong support system which included a place like the office of Native American Programs which offers the above mentioned counseling and advisement. However, support for them came in many other forms as well.

A counseling center director explained the importance of having a Native American Student Services Center:

Students come in here everyday. They congregate. Having a place is critical. I have several students who have family members far away. They have spiritual concerns too. Students have a cultural background and it's not affirmed, accepted. Usually faculty say they can't deal with it. It's not hostility, just indifference. At least, in here, they've got somewhere to go ( Tierney, 1992, p.96).

The Colorado State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in Denver (1995) states in their findings and recommendations section that "Adequate staff should be provided for the Hispanic and Native American student centers, and incoming high-risk students should be motivated to use these and academic support services provided by the college" (p.47). An interesting statement provided in the Colorado report revealed that not all in academia agree with the concept of cultural centers.

Not all faculty agree that the center furthers the cultural adjustment of minority students. Mr. Lundquist observed that though black, Hispanic, and Native American clubs provide a place to meet others of the same general background and feel comfortable, they increase the isolation of minority students and keep them from making the connections they need. He believes that the minority students who

succeed are not the ones going to the Intercultural Center, but those who are involved in the campus as a whole and in student government. Mr. Felix said, however, that the center does play a key role for Indian students and that many students refer to it as their own internal reservation (p.199).

This report addressed issues regarding minority retention. Quality interaction with college faculty is seen as another factor which is important for minority students to persist.

The Quentin N. Burdick Indians into Nursing Program (1996) located at the University of North Dakota, also known as the RAIN program, is a successful program designed to recruit American Indian students into the nursing profession. They have developed a model program of non-academic retention strategies. Of major importance in the plan is an open door policy and a gathering place for students in the College of Nursing. According to staff, providing services to American Indian students fosters self-confidence and success. Before the Native American nursing students had a place to gather and hang out, they used to come to class and leave immediately afterward. Now the students stay on campus and get involved in campus activities.

G. Bruce Meyers (1997) found many examples of successful Native American model programs. The most successful programs offered academic support services, intrusive monitoring, mentoring, aggressive academic advising, and study groups. There were also student groups and clubs which strive to involve fellow students in social and cultural events.

Williamson (1994) reported that 139 Mexican American and 38 American Indian doctoral students completed a free response question at the end of a lengthy questionnaire



in which the students were allowed to address issues relating to their graduate experience.

One American Indian female student stated about her graduate school experience:

Until this year, I had not had any opportunity to meet other Indian students here. I grew up in an Indian community and felt very separated from my community.

(Community) is where I am from, but it is not an official reservation. The land was divided up between tribal members in the early 1900's. This institution did not have any organization for Indian students until this year. Also, my college does not have any ideas of how to connect me with other Indians. The Indian Center has now filled that void (p.18).

A second student had this to say:

I believe that a mentor/faculty advisor/faculty member who takes a special interest in the academic and personal well-being of the minority student is important. My success in adapting to the doctoral program and the university is due to my advisor who I met while working on my master's degree. He has taken extreme interest in my pursuits over the last five years (ever since I have known him) (p.23).

Williamson concluded that the institution must be responsible for policy and practice which leads minority students to success.

In a study by Wells (1997), factors were identified which contributed to Native American higher education success or failure. Providing a strong support system which is "pro-active and intrusive in nature" (p.5) is of utmost importance. Many schools in the Wells (1997) study responded that they had Native American counselors and Native American student organizations.



An essay in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled "If Minority Students are to Succeed in Higher Education, Every Rung of the Educational Ladder Must be in Place" identified factors which were essential for student success. Chief among these factors was the importance of adequate tutoring services, learning laboratories, and organized mentoring programs (Richardson, 1989).

Stebbins (1998) reported that survey results conducted to identify obstacles to college success among present and former American Indian students at State University of New York College at Potsdam revealed that the most important factor in the students positive experiences were the professors. One student expressed it very well when asked what contributed to a good experience at Potsdam. He replied "The professors." When asked what contributed to a negative experience the student replied "Other professors" (Stebbins, 1998).

Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) also find the teacher student relationship vital. They stated:

We believe a primary focus of research and practice must be the teaching-learning relationship between students and teachers. This relationship is the most basic interaction that takes place in schools each day and one that determines whether students will persist or not (p.302).

However, support cannot stop at the door of the classroom. Faculty must reach out to less verbal minority students by making appointments to talk with them. Frequent contact is necessary inside and outside the classroom. This can be done through mentoring or setting up a buddy system (Clark & Cheng, 1993).

To provide effective mentoring, Adams and Wadsworth (1989) suggested that information about cultural sensitivity and workshops on mentoring should be given to faculty on a regular basis. Well planned retention initiatives with positive reinforcers should be used, and faculty should be well rewarded for their retention effort. The more informal the interaction between faculty and students, the more retention increases (Pipes, Westby, & Inglebert, 1993).

The Quality Education for Minorities Network (1997) completed a project designed to identify institutions of higher education which were highly successful in awarding higher education degrees to minority students, including American Indians. The ten most successful institutions provided special offices devoted to minority affairs and accessible faculty who expressed interest in working with minority students on academic concerns beyond normal working hours.

It is clear from recent studies that faculty members can play a critical role in the retention of Indian college students. Betz (1991) found that recognizing the need for a strong support person was crucial for success. "Faculty are the people who can most directly affect the motivation and desire of Indian students to remain in school (p.12).

Wagner (1992) found that minority students who participate in academic and social support groups can draw strength and wisdom from each other. Minority students who have support groups also called "communities of color" ( p.41) can share life experiences and help each other with homework. Wagner also insists that it is necessary to develop a culture within college departments which encourages and supports mentoring by faculty. Social support must be "part of the normal routines of the institution" (p.47).



Institutions must commit at all levels to provide services to Native American students. Faculty and staff who show interest in Indian students are key in assisting these students to have a successful college experience (Falk & Aitken , 1984). The best possible way to increase American Indian success in higher education is to present American Indians with doctorates as successful mentors and role models (Lintner, 1999).

It is apparent from multiple findings throughout the literature that Native American students need an effective support system in place in order to help them succeed. Faculty willing to assist and interact with these students is also an essential component. Finally, a place or community of others of the same cultural group increases the comfort level leading to a successful academic experience.

**Theme three: *The participants had a positive self-image which contributed to a successful academic experience.*** There is an abundance of articles in the psychology literature documenting the importance of a positive self-concept to be a successful human being. However, the literature regarding Native American student academic success and the impact of self-image was much more manageable. The following section will address that literature, most of which indicates the effect of a poor self-image in Native American students.

Ardy Sixkiller Clarke (1994) found that historically, Indian students drop-out of school at higher rates than any other minority group in America. Four explanations are often offered in the literature to explain student failure:

- Cultural differences between American Indian and the white system
- Social disorganization within tribal groups and families.



- Poor self-concept of the American Indian students, or
- Low socioeconomic status (p.5).

The results of Clarke's study indicated that respondents who dropped out of school demonstrated significant differences in self-esteem measures compared to graduates. A result supported in most of the literature.

Clarke (1994) prepared a report for the Office of Educational Research, Washington, DC. The report examined personal, cultural, school, and family factors which contributed to the decision of American Indian students to remain in school until graduation or drop-out.

The self-esteem and self-concept data from our study indicates that the great majority of Indians see themselves as fairly competent persons within their own social world. This social world is characterized for the majority of these young people by Indianness and by poverty. If they come into contact with expectations by teachers of others from the social world of the urban-industrial and middle-class society, we should expect them to show some self doubt about their competence, and we should expect their self-esteem score to be lowered (p.27).

Another researcher in the Clarke (1994) paper found that cultural conflict is a major factor contributing to dropping out:

As the child becomes increasingly aware of cultural and racial differences, he falls progressively below grade level norms. When the adolescent Indian internalized his/her differences, feelings of inferiority and hopelessness corrode and disintegrate once-held dreams for a positive future .... The Indian's eventual reaction to this

cultural differentiation often manifests itself as alienation, poor self-image, withdrawal and, in a word, dropout (p. 9).

Poor self-esteem has frequently been attributed to the failure of American Indian children in school. Clarke (1994) reports a study that describes the problem of poor self-esteem of American Indian youth: "There is much evidence that Indian students feel despair, disillusionment, alienation, frustration, hopelessness, powerlessness, rejection, and estrangement, all elements of negative views of the self"(p.26).

Fortunately, the participants in my study did not fall into this category of doom. There were intervening factors such as supportive parents and teachers support which increased self-esteem.

Self-esteem is a significant predictor of academic achievement. This finding that suggests the relationship of a positive self-esteem to school motivation and achievement is consistent with what is found in the literature (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Wilson 1991). One effective way to promote positive self-esteem is to implement in schools teacher development designed to help them understand how to promote and build academic self-esteem in students (Hardeman, 1985). It is important to remember that although families play a crucial role in promoting values and attitudes such as self-esteem, teachers play a major role as well.

Hornett (1989) presents practical suggestions for faculty to promote success in American Indian college students. If faculty recognize the need for positive self-images in students and gauge whether or not their expectations of the students are based on actual performance and not cultural stereotypes, the student will be successful. In this way,



Indian students realize that any perceived incompatibility between their own expectation and those of their non-Indian teachers are not based on racism; rather, they are the consistent expectations of the teachers for all students (Betz, 1991). Self-confidence comes with learning and success.

Whittaker (1986) studied the differences between graduates and dropouts of a teacher education program over a nine year period. He found graduates were internally oriented and well-adjusted with positive self-attitudes and good academic adjustment. Non-graduates were found to be impulsive with less personal integration, high anxiety, and a more negative self-image.

Tierney (1994) helps to sum up the topic of self-esteem. Providing Indian students with hope and confidence must be primary goals of any educational experience. "Self-esteem is essential in terms of both the student's previous schooling and future educational goals" (p.124).

Self-esteem is largely related to student achievement and success. Students must believe that they are worthwhile and deserving of the respect from their teachers and peers. If that self-respect is missing then there is no reason to try. Once the downward spiral begins the literature indicates that the students will often drop-out.

**Theme four: *The participants described themselves as self-disciplined and/or goal-oriented.*** Planning and goal setting become important for students as they relate directly to envisioning a sense of purpose in education. In a comprehensive study conducted by Cleary and Peacock (1998), teachers of American Indian students were interviewed in an effort to better understand these students in an educational setting.



Cleary and Peacock found that “when students learned from being involved in projects that had real audiences and real purposes, they understood how to read their world, how to collect information, and how to act on their world” (p. 218).

Williamson’s 1994 study left her hopeful about future doctoral completion rates because of the remarks of the participants in her study. One student, like so many in my study, said “I was able to complete my doctoral goal because I am a fiercely determined person when I get my mind on a goal that means so much to me (and this one was)” (p. 26).

Another practical suggestion for faculty made by Hornett (1989) was to recognize the need for long-range and short-term goals and objectives. According to Hornett, Indian students might have a “present time” orientation and might not see a relationship between what they are doing in the present and ultimate goal choices. Faculty can use the following techniques to increase goal setting with Native American students:

- Return exams promptly which will link performance with outcome;
  - Work with students to set up goals which are easily and quickly accomplished and gradually lengthen the time between production and return; and
  - Provide clear reminders of expectations for upcoming exams or activities
- (p.16).

A study by Coburn & Nelson (1987), focused on how schools have helped Indian students to succeed. Students who graduated were asked about their high school experience. Teachers were found to be the most influential in the student’s school life. Students (57%) identified at least one specific teacher. They also (65%) indicated that they

succeeded because these teachers encouraged them to set goals. Many of these same students spoke about the importance of having the goal of going on to college or a career in the military. When asked what advice these same graduates might give to teachers on how to encourage other students to be successful, they indicated that “prompting the student to set and accomplish goals, and to tell the students that they can succeed” as most important (p. 5).

Coburn & Nelson (1987) reported findings that indicated that a certain number of non-academic characteristics were present in outstanding students. They were self-concept/attitude, motivation/aspirations, social participation, and athletic participation. They also reported that student success and success as an adult are highly related. Successful individuals had a personal goal set by them or their parents.

Finally, Falk and Aitken (1984) state that in relationship to retention, “Personal motivation, the importance placed on this factor, suggests that despite institutional, family, and tribal efforts to increase retention, it is still necessary for each student to persevere through difficult times” (p. 30). The participants in this study reported they knew the importance of setting goals and claimed to be self-disciplined enough to finish the goals they had set for themselves.

**Theme five: *The participants engaged in extra-curricular activities during their schooling which enhanced their academic experience.*** Participation in extra-curricular activities is mentioned in most of the major studies completed on the retention of Native American students all through their educational experiences. I have already discussed participation in Indian programs and groups on campuses in theme two. Here I will



mention only a few of the current studies indicating the connection of extra-curricular activities to success or failure in academe.

Sprenger (1992), wrote in her paper presented at the National Conference on Creating the Quality School, that low participation in extra-curricular activities by Indian students creates problems. One school mentioned in the Sprenger paper found a way to include Indian students. They placed emphasis on the arts and extra-curricular activities that placed the activities on an equal footing with sports because "many Native Americans are non-competitive" (p.17).

Many other articles support the emphasis on extra-curricular participation. Half of the students surveyed in the Coburn & Nelson (1987) study attributed their academic success to the attention of teachers and participation in sports and other extra-curricular activities.

According to the Washington State Johnson O'Malley Indian Education 1983-84 annual report, the same conclusion is always reached when assessment is made of dropouts. Student involvement affects the dropout factor. "If students get involved in the extra-curricular activities of the school, they are much less likely to become a dropout statistic" (p.30).

The Northern Cheyenne Dropout Research Project by Ward (1991) found that overall, the students who dropped out had lower GPA's, lower participation in remedial courses, and "much less participation in extra-curricular activities" (p.32). Ward also reports that among the many factors which students indicated helped them to succeed, participation in sports was most frequently mentioned, followed closely by other extra-



curricular activities. Cervantes (1988), claims the success of retention programs depends on intensified recruiting, counseling, faculty mentoring and extra-curricular activities.

***Other Common Features:*** First, all but one participant “stopped-out” at least one time during their educational experience. Second, the participants were products of public, private, or parochial education during their preparatory years.

A review of the literature revealed no body of information about the effect of stopping-out of college and competing a college degree. Stopping-out is a common feature among Native American students and their college experience. For example, the North Seattle Community College Multicultural Fact Book (1993) revealed that among students entering in fall 1991 with the intent to stay for one year or more, 67% of Native Americans had stopped out at least one quarter as of fall of 1992. The literature does not indicate if or when the students returned.

According to Carney (1999),

How many go on to college, how many go several years after high school, how many take longer than four years or return after dropping out, and particularly how many who enter college actually eventually graduate are all important questions about which less than ideal information is available (p. 149).

There appears to be a lack of information in the literature about the effect stopping-out has on the completion of a college degree. Recommendations for further research on this topic are made in the recommendations section in Chapter VI.

The second feature the participants had in common was that they were products of public, private, or parochial education during their preparatory years. Each year an average

of 39,300 Native American students attend BIA or tribal schools (Whitener, 1997). The participants in this study did not attend BIA/tribal schools. There is an implication that students who attend BIA schools are not introduced to main-stream thought and culture and have a more difficult time adjusting to college. There is a clash between cultures felt in the college classroom which is "complicated by rural, reservation, and inner-city backgrounds that leave many Native American students educationally under-prepared to compete at selected institutions" (Garrod & Larimore, 1997).

Graduation rates by school type were reported in the American Indian and Alaska Natives in Post-secondary Education Technical Report (Pavel et. al.,1998). In 1993-1994, 47 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native students attended BIA/tribal schools or "high Indian enrollment schools." The BIA/tribal schools reported that 86 percent of their seniors graduated compared to schools with low Indian enrollment which had a graduation rate of 94 percent (Pavel et al, 1998). There is a difference in the graduations rates between schools but no mention of a connection between graduating from either type of school and having success in college.

If there is a connection between the type of preparatory school a Native American student attends and becoming a successful college student there is no body of literature which alludes to this fact. Recommendations for further research on this topic are made in the recommendations section in Chapter VI.

In summary, the literature supports the success factors the participants expressed during the interviews. Most of the literature emphasizes research on failure instead of success; however, the findings produce similarities. Parents, teachers, college faculty,

mentors, support systems, attitude, and extra-curricular involvement all contribute to the success or lack of success of the Native American student at all levels of his/her education. There is no body of literature which indicates a connection between stopping-out and completing a college degree. There is no body of literature which discusses a connection between the type of preparatory school a Native American student attends and having success in college.

Chapter VI will provide a summary, conclusions, and recommendations. The recommendations will be divided into recommendations for practice and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with personal reflections.



## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The purpose of this study is to better understand the successful educational experiences among Native American doctoral recipients from the north central United States. Why did they succeed where so many others have failed to reach that level of education? This study provides the actual statements from participants about their positive experiences which contribute to their academic success.

Why was this important for me to pursue? Simply because hearing the stories about success gives me something to report to the schools, parents groups, school boards, and colleges. Giving voice with rich detail to these successes will be my contribution to aid faculty and administration with preparing teachers and faculty to assist in future successes and to make new policy to aid in successes.

The participants were professionals, working within reasonable travel distance of my location with a terminal degree in their chosen field. Six participants earned Ph.D. degrees, one earned an Ed.D., two earned J.D. degrees, and one earned an M.D. degree. All of the participants were working in their chosen fields.

Qualitative methods were used to study the educational experiences of ten successful Native American professionals from kindergarten through the completion of their terminal degree. Interviews which ranged from four to six hours were conducted in the

participants' choice of location during the spring and summer of 1997. A follow-up telephone interview was also conducted. Chapter III provides the context of the interviews and the individual background of each and academic history of each participant.

Data gathered during the interviews were analyzed by an inductive coding process and then organized into categories from which five themes emerged. Chapter IV identifies the five themes and Chapter V provides a review of the literature which relates to the themes. The themes are listed and summarized as follows:

**Theme one: The value of education was highly stressed by the participant, his/her family and mentors all through the educational experience.** All of the participants indicated that their family highly valued education. All of the participants come from families in which multiple family members hold advanced academic degrees. Their parents participated, in some capacity, in the educational experience. Some encouraged reading, some helped with homework, some parents participated in school activities, but all stressed in word or by example, the importance of higher education. In some cases, the parents were not the key individuals to stress the importance of education. If it was not a parent, it was a close member of the extended family or a teacher or mentor. The literature strongly supports the importance of parental involvement as a critical factor in the successful completion of high school and college.

**Theme two: A strong faculty member/mentor and Native American support system (often called a community) was available and very important to the participants as they progressed to the completion of their terminal degree.** All participants stressed the importance of having a support system. The importance of having



a faculty mentor, someone who cared about the student's academic success was stressed by all. The mentor was someone who wouldn't let them quit. Beyond the individual mentor relationship, the participants all reported being part of a community of other people like themselves. Typically, this was a group of other Indian students who provided support. The participants also stressed the need for a gathering place such as a Native American cultural center where they could find a home-away-from-home and a place to feel safe. The literature strongly supports the importance of the faculty/mentor relationship as well as having cultural centers for minority students.

**Theme three: The participants had a positive self-image which contributed to a successful academic experience.** Having a good educational experience beginning in the early grades was common among the participants. They liked school and liked most of their teachers. Most important was their positive attitude about themselves. Many of them indicating that they were popular, intelligent individuals who were expected to succeed and they did. The literature stresses the importance of confidence-building by family and teachers. The literature also underscores the profound impact on dropping out of school that poor self-esteem and self-concept have on students.

**Theme four: The participants described themselves as self-disciplined and/or goal-oriented.** The participants indicated they had a drive to succeed. There were many comments about having a strict work ethic instilled in them by parents which made the participants internalize the non-physical discipline practiced in the home and in their schools. The military background of their parents or the participants themselves also played a role in the development of self-discipline and the ability to organize and to set



goals. The literature also supports the importance of goal-setting and the impact of educators who aid in the development of these critical skills.

**Theme five: The participants engaged in extra-curricular activities during their schooling which enhanced their academic experience.** All participants reported they engaged in some form of extra-curricular activity at some level of their educational experience. The activity was not necessarily an athletic sport activity. Many participated in student organizations at all levels. There were also participants who expressed their regret at not getting involved in extra-curricular activity earlier in their academic career because of what they missed in social engagement. The literature review strongly supports the importance of extra-curricular activity in school. There is a strong connection between extra-curricular activity and success or failure in academe.

***Other Common Features:*** First, all but one participant “stopped-out” at least one time during their educational experience. Second, the participants were products of public, private, or parochial education during their preparatory years.

### Conclusions

There is a relationship among the five themes. This study emphasizes the need for a qualitative look at what contributes to the academic success of Native American students. The literature is full of the doom and gloom statistics about why so many Native American students fail. Without much effort, I found ten very successful Native American professionals in the upper Midwest who had received a terminal degree in their chosen field. These individuals were not special in the sense that none of them grew up privileged or rich. They all claimed to have been financially poor to some degree. They all claimed to

be good students, but also indicated that school was not always easy. Most claimed to have been poorly prepared academically for higher education which made college difficult at times. Yet they persevered and graduated.

The answer to their success is not because these were special individuals in some way, but more likely, because of all the factors which supported them on their way to success. It can be said nine of the ten participants were listed by an administrator at their respective institutions as drop-outs. Anytime a student leaves school he/she is listed as having dropped out. Only one participant completed his education without taking time out for military service, illness, or some other personal reason. Yet, all the others returned and graduated. A better term for the occurrence of leaving college for these students would be "stopping out." This term does not negatively imply failure but does positively imply an intended return. In this study "stopping out" did not impede success.

The literature is full of the five themes documented in this study. However, often the literature was written in response to a lack of services for Native American students and the negative impact on the successful completion of a degree. I have presented through this interview study a positive view using the voices of these successful participants which provides insight and meaning to the sources of their success.

### Implications

Parents, teachers, faculty, mentors, and administrators must become aware of the important role they play in providing the five themes of support the participants indicated made them successful. They must work together. Parents do not stop providing academic support when a child graduates from high school. College administrators must include



parents in the Native American student's program as the student begins higher education. Parents who are invited and come to the school campus will become aware of several factors. As parents see the physical environment in which their child will be living they can be confident about safety issues. The parent will also become aware of the academic expectations placed on the student and understand that the student must study and will not be able to come home every weekend. It is important to keep Native American parents involved at all levels of the student's educational experience

A strong support system for Native American students relieves a great deal of stress. Students have indicated that they need a place to feel comfortable. Administration at institutions of higher education must be aware of the function cultural centers fill for Native American student. The administration must have a plan which provides adequate funding for the cultural center and a support staff which can assist the Native American students with educational, financial aid, and personal concerns.

The importance of having a positive self-image was apparent. Teachers in the early grades can provide opportunities for Native American children to express themselves and excel. The participants in this study have indicated that opportunities to feel worthy in their early educational experience have stayed with them all through life.

The participants have made it clear that they appreciate being taught the importance of self-discipline and goal setting at an early age. If teachers can provide the opportunities in the curriculum used in the classroom to learn the value of discipline and goal setting more Native American students can be successful.



Extra-curricular activities added to the success of the Native American students in this study. It provided the participants with the opportunity to interact with other students like themselves and with those from outside their world increasing their exposure to diversity. School administrations must provide opportunities for all Native American students to participate. The activities must be varied. Not all students are athletic. Not all students can afford to participate in extra-curricular activities. Not all students are competitive. All these factors must be considered and provided for when planning so that all Native American students can participate.

#### Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations are provided to all parents, teachers, faculty, mentors, and administrators who will impact the academic outcome of Native American students.

1. Create a task force to oversee the necessary research and subsequent planning and implementation of successful parenting programs for Native American students.
2. Provide funding for teacher development in order to retain Native American students.
3. Create a task force to oversee the necessary research and subsequent planning and implementation of dropout prevention programs.
4. Provide training in colleges of education to professors about what works in Indian education and information about the language, history, and culture of the Indian student.
5. Provide mentoring training for teachers and faculty stressing the need and importance of personal contact for Native American students.

6. Make a connection between parents and schools which goes beyond dropping the child off at the school door. Parents must become involved in what makes the school function, who the teachers are, and what is being taught in the classroom.

7. Administrators must find ways to encourage students to participate in extra-curricular activities. Activities must be provided which will attract Native American students remembering that not all activities should be competitive.

8. Teachers must take the lead early in a Native American child's life to teach the child the importance of organization, discipline, and goal setting.

11. Administrators at institutions of higher education must recognize the important role cultural centers play in the lives of Native American college students. Students who have a place to congregate with others like themselves are not likely to drop-out.

12. Literature that informs the players (parents, teachers, faculty, mentors, and administrators) about the importance of the roles that they play in decreasing the dropout rate is needed.

13. Develop more Indian related programs on campuses to provide more support for Native American students.

14. Develop an ongoing cultural awareness program for faculty, staff, and all students to increase the level of comfort Native American students feel on campus.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

1. More research is necessary to study the impact "stopping-out" has on the completion of a terminal degree.

2. More research is necessary to study the impact of Native American students attending public, private, or parochial schools on the successful completion of a degree.

3. Research is needed which focuses on the specific educational experiences of Native American students during their graduate work.

### Personal Reflections

The reader may have noticed the pseudonym that I chose for each individual is a tree. I wanted to choose names which would indicate the respect I feel for the individuals. A tree best describes how I visualized how the participants are contributing to Indian communities and society in general. They all have roots in the Indian and non-Indian world in which they live. There is strength in their trunk or body which stands tall and upright in the community in which they practice their profession. Their branches reach out to function in many areas contributing as individuals to family, education, church, and other community service. The leaves are the individuals whose lives have been touched by these participants. Perhaps the leaves indicate individuals whom the participants have mentored, assisted with medical care, or helped through the legal system. Every year a tree adds new leaves. Every year these participants will positively affect the lives of new individuals with whom they come into contact. I hope that the participants were pleased with their moniker.

Another thought I would like to address is that I fully comprehend that the themes that participants indicated made the road to success easy for Native American students also are critical to Non Native American students. However, these support needs for Native



American students are significantly greater because of the historically difficult time reservations have had in providing adequate preparation for higher education.

There are many recommendations for making policy which will impact future Native American students. However, I want to stress what I see as the best way to proceed after studying all of these themes. No one single variable will make a student successful. What is needed is a more holistic approach that will enrich the environment for success to take place. Parents, teachers, faculty, mentors, and administrators must work together to provide a personalized plan for Native American students.

It has been made clear by the participants how important input from all these individuals was for their success. From personal experience I can tell you how much it means to have a professor who is a committee member for twelve other students call me up, show concern, and check on why she has not seen me in the department lately. The phone call only took five minutes of her time, but the effect of that phone call lasted for weeks.

As I finish writing I am compelled to express how profoundly the participants influenced me to finish this dissertation. Being compulsive in my need to finish what I start, I have been shocked, even wounded by the lack of my ability to complete this work in a timely manner. There have been factors which occurred in the past six years that contributed to my lack of ambition to finish. The death of my mother, the loss of our home and possessions in the great flood of 1997, and full time employment. The hardest thing to live with has been the guilt. I have not enjoyed a single activity in the past three years

without being weighted down by guilty knowledge that I should have been writing. I would think about my excuses and feel even worse.

It was only with the gentle prodding of my mentors that I picked up the folders and began to read the interviews again. I realized that I had become a “stop-out” myself and that I could finish just like the participants did. I wanted to be like them and make a difference for Indian people. I wanted to succeed, influenced by what they told me in their personal stories. I owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

To participants in this study:

I am a graduate student at the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks. The subject of my doctoral research is: "The Educational Experience of Successful American Indians." I am interviewing successful Indian men and women in North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and possibly in some other states, who have completed a terminal degree and are working successfully as a professional in their individual fields. You are one of approximately 10 participants.

As part of this study, you are being asked to participate in two in-depth interviews. The first interview will focus on your educational experiences at during primary school, secondary school and then your college experience. I am interested in the concrete details of your educational life story, your relationships with family, your relationships with mentors, and how your experiences relate to the completion of a terminal degree and employment success. I would like to spend the day with you so the interview time could range from 3-6 hours or more. The second interview will be one week after the first interview (in person if you are a local resident or via the telephone if you live out of state). This second interview will allow you to add details that you might remember after completion of the first interview and could last one hour. As the interviews proceed I may ask an occasional question for clarification or for further understanding, but mainly my part will be to listen as you recreate your experiences within the structure and focus of the interviews.

My goal is to analyze the materials from your interviews in order to better understand your experience and that of the other American Indian men and women who have "beaten the odds" and completed their education. The findings will allow me to make recommendations for increased success in achieving a terminal degree for American Indian high-school and college students and to provide information for college faculty working with such students. As part of the dissertation, I may compose the materials from your interviews as a "profile" in your own works. I may also wish to use some of the interview material for journal articles or presentations to interested groups, or for instructional purposes in my teaching. I may wish to write a book based on the dissertation.

Each interview will be audiotaped and later transcribed. In all written materials from your interview, I will not use your name, names of people close to you, or the name of your college or city. Transcripts will be typed with initials for names, and in final form the interview material will use pseudonyms.

You may at any time withdraw from the interview process. You may withdraw your consent to have specific excerpts used, if you notify me at the end of the interview series. If I were to want to use any materials in any way not consistent with what is stated above, I would ask for your additional written consent. In signing this form, you are also assuring me that you will make no financial claims for the use of the material in your interviews.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the above statement and agree to participate as an interviewee under the conditions stated above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of interviewer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Questions are divided into three parts as a general outline to follow if the interviewee has trouble getting started to remember the intimate details. Since this is qualitative research my questions will be prepared only to gain details and clarification.

**Part One:**

Please tell me about your memories of grade school. Share intimate details about:

- What role did teachers play?
- What made school hard?
- What made school easy?
- What part did parents play?
- What part did siblings play?
- What part did peer's play

**Part Two:**

Please tell me about your memories of junior high and high school. Share intimate details about:

- What role did teachers play?
- What made school hard?
- What made school easy?
- What part did parents play?
- What part did siblings play?
- What part did peer's play

**Part Three:**

- What role did teachers play?
- Did you have a mentor?
- What made school hard?
- What made school easy?
- What part did parents play?
- What part did siblings play?
- What part did peer's play
- How far from home?
- How long between high school and college?
- How many years to terminal degree?
- How far in debt?
- Were you married? Single? Living alone or in dorm?
- Did college setting have a support group?
- Were you involved in campus activities?



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